

# **Record of Decision**

## **Final Environmental Impact Statement to accompany the Land and Resource Management Plan**

### **Green Mountain National Forest**

Eastern Region  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin  
February 2006

<b>Responsible Agency</b>	USDA Forest Service
<b>Responsible Official</b>	Randy Moore, Regional Forester Gaslight Building, Suite 800 626 E. Wisconsin Avenue Milwaukee, WI 53203 414-297-3765
<b>For further information contact</b>	Melissa Reichert, Forest Planner Green Mountain and Finger Lakes National Forests 231 N. Main St. Rutland, VT 05701 802-747-6754 <a href="mailto:gmflplanrevision@fs.fed.us">gmflplanrevision@fs.fed.us</a>
<b>Green Mountain National Forest</b>	Addison County Bennington County Rutland County Washington County Windham County Windsor County

*"In the administration of the forest reserves, it must be clearly borne in mind that all land is to be devoted to its most productive use for the permanent good of the whole people, and...[W]here conflicting interests must be reconciled the question will always be decided from the standpoint of the greatest good of the greatest number in the long run."*

- Gifford Pinchot, First Chief of the USDA Forest Service, 1905

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# RECORD OF DECISION

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## Preface

This Record of Decision (ROD) describes my decision to select Alternative E Modified as the Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF) 2006 Land and Resource Management Plan (2006 Forest Plan). The ROD also explains my reasons for making changes to the 1987 Forest Plan. I have reviewed the range of alternatives, considered public input, and reviewed the evaluation of the alternatives as documented in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Alternative E from the Draft EIS was modified to include some elements from other alternatives considered in detail. These changes for the selected alternative were based upon public comments received during the three month comment period, new information, and further investigation and analysis by Forest Service staff.

Although I am the final decision maker, I have not made this decision alone. The staff of the GMNF analyzed more than 10,000 comment letters and 4,000 substantive comments during the development of the 2006 Forest Plan. Hundreds of citizens talked with members of the planning team during meetings held throughout the planning process. Meaningful collaboration with local governments, state and federal agencies, and various interest groups resulted in valuable contributions to the revision effort. This decision is the result of the positive and productive relationships that evolved during the planning process and the important contributions from all who participated. We have listened to the public and it has shaped the development of this 2006 Forest Plan.

I want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all those who worked closely with Forest Service staff throughout the planning process. You helped us identify issues, identify the need for change, and develop alternatives. In addition, your substantive comments on the Draft EIS and Proposed Revised Forest Plan led us to make many changes for the final documents. Your continued interest and participation will be important as we implement, monitor, and update the 2006 Forest Plan in the years to come. We are very aware that the GMNF does not exist in isolation. The GMNF is one part of larger State and regional landscapes, and our management actions affect surrounding communities and ecosystems. This is all the more reason we value the breadth of input we have received.

Developing a Forest Plan that is supported by most members of the public is not easy. The Green Mountain National Forest provides different uses to many people and those people often have divergent values and views on how to manage public lands. The Forest includes some of Vermont's most beautiful landscapes, which contribute to tourism, recreational opportunities, and the quality of life for individuals and communities. The Forest is ecologically diverse, providing a home for many native plants, animals, natural communities, and water resources, as well as both softwood and hardwood forests which provide important wood products to society.

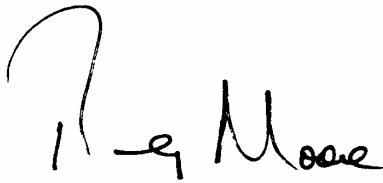
The 2006 Forest Plan is the result of a comprehensive evaluation of the 1987 Forest Plan, an examination of the best available scientific information, and extensive public involvement including an in-depth notice and comment process. The revision process has taken over four years and has been the focus of an interdisciplinary team comprised of natural resource specialists and planners. My role, as well as the role of the GMNF Forest Supervisor, has been to guide the process, listen to the public, facilitate the collaboration efforts, ensure the integrity of the analysis, and make important decisions throughout the process, including the final decision documented in this ROD.

My decision establishes a Forest Plan that, I believe, emphasizes benefits that are most important to agencies, groups, and individuals involved in the revision process. Together, we have crafted a Forest Plan that provides a scientifically credible foundation for the contribution of the GMNF to the ecological,

social, and economic sustainability of Vermont over the long-term. Development of future project decisions consistent with the 2006 Forest Plan will result in a sustainable supply of goods and services from the GMNF while conserving the natural resources of the area for future generations. This decision will sustain the Forest's resources and strikes a reasonable balance among the complex demands expressed by a wide variety of people, groups, and organizations.

Our work is not done. Regular monitoring and evaluation of implementation activities will ensure the 2006 Forest Plan is kept current. Changes in society's needs and values, along with emerging science, may necessitate amendments to the 2006 Forest Plan. The challenge that remains before all of us is to continue to work together to implement this Forest Plan. I fully understand this can sometimes be difficult, but I am confident that cooperation and continued collaboration will unite us. I believe we share the common goal that these lands remain productive, ecologically healthy, and beautiful for both the current and future generations.

I thank you again for your support, participation, and patience throughout this process. I encourage your continued partnership in helping implement the 2006 Forest Plan and in keeping it fresh and relevant.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Randy Moore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Randy" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Moore".

RANDY MOORE  
Regional Forester

## Introduction

The GMNF 2006 Forest Plan is a 10 to 15 year strategy for managing national forest resources. It was developed in accordance with the National Forest Management Act (16 U.S.C.1604, et seq.). As provided by the 2005 planning rule (36 CFR 219.14), the planning procedures of the 1982 planning rule were used to complete the plan revision. The 2006 Forest Plan outlines environmentally sound management to achieve desired conditions on the land and produce goods and services in a way that maximizes long-term net public benefits. The 2006 Forest Plan emphasizes different desired conditions and goals for various parts of the Forest. As we develop site-specific projects consistent with the 2006 Forest Plan, management practices such as improving and maintaining roads, restoring streams, enhancing wildlife habitat, harvesting timber, and improving recreational facilities and trails will occur in some areas, but not in others. We intend to achieve multiple use goals and objectives in a balanced, cost-efficient, and sustainable manner.

This 2006 Forest Plan replaces the 1987 Forest Plan for the GMNF. It provides an integrated, programmatic framework for environmentally sound management based on the best available scientific information.

The 2006 Forest Plan will be amended or revised as necessary to respond to changed conditions, new information, Congressional designations, as well as changing needs and opportunities. Any action taken to amend or revise the Plan will include public involvement.

The following key decisions are made with the 2006 Forest Plan:

1. Forest-wide multiple-use goals and objectives
2. Forest-wide management requirements (such as standards and guidelines)
3. Management area direction
4. Lands suited and not suited for timber production and establishment of an allowable sale quantity
5. Monitoring and evaluation requirements

## 6. Recommendations to Congress (such as for wilderness designations)

The goals and desired conditions in the 2006 Forest Plan can be achieved from a physical, ecological, economical, and legal perspective. Management practices will be implemented and outputs produced as the Forest Service strives to meet the desired conditions called for in the 2006 Forest Plan, although there is no assurance that the outputs will actually occur at the projected level.

The standards contained in the GMNF 2006 Forest Plan set parameters within which projects must take place. Approval of any project must be consistent with these parameters (16 U.S.C. 1604(i)). If a project cannot be implemented in accordance with the standards included in the 2006 Forest Plan, the project cannot go forward unless the project is modified or the 2006 Forest Plan is amended. Guidelines will generally be followed, but where deviations from guidelines are needed, we will not necessarily amend the plan, but will discuss the rationale as part of the site-specific project analysis.

The 2006 Forest Plan is permissive in that it allows, but does not mandate, projects and activities. Projects occur only after they are proposed, their environmental effects considered, and a decision is made authorizing site-specific action. Site-specific environmental analysis that occurs for each project will be tiered to the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the 2006 Forest Plan, pursuant to 40 CFR 1508.28.

The 2006 Forest Plan was developed with contributions from many people. I want to take this opportunity to personally thank all of our partners and members of the public who took the time to attend public meetings, or who reviewed and commented on the Draft EIS and Proposed Revised Forest Plan. I would also like to thank those who contributed scientific information and analysis in the species evaluation process.

Although the resource information used to develop the 2006 Forest Plan may not be as

comprehensive as some would desire, we have sought out and used the best available scientific information for making this programmatic decision. Although it is always possible to obtain more information prior to making any decision, I am confident that the information used here is of high quality and adequate to make a fully informed decision. We appreciate your support of the 2006 Forest Plan and look forward to working with you to develop projects that will move us towards the desired conditions described in the Plan.

In summary, the 2006 Forest Plan establishes a programmatic framework for future multiple-use management and provides a framework for future decision-making. The Final EIS discloses the differences in the potential

environmental consequences of implementing each alternative and how these alternatives respond to issues and concerns. The Final EIS discusses broad environmental effects and establishes a useful reference that can be tiered to for compliance with environmental laws at the site-specific project level. The level of effects disclosure is commensurate with the nature of the programmatic decision. Detailed analysis of specific environmental effects is not required when the agency has not proposed a specific project that may cause the effects. Approval of this 2006 Forest Plan does not make any on-the-ground changes, nor dictate that any particular site-specific action must occur.

Rochester Valley



## The Forest

The GMNF encompasses over 400,000 acres in southern and central Vermont, forming the largest contiguous public land area in the State. The lands making up the GMNF have been part of the cultural landscape for many years. Interactions between people and nature have kept mountain ecosystems and landscapes evolving. The Forest was established under the provisions of the Weeks Act of 1911, which

authorized the federal government to purchase land to establish new National Forests with States' consent, largely as a measure to protect headwaters of navigable streams and to prevent wildfires. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, poor farming, grazing and logging practices in Vermont resulted in soil erosion, stream degradation, and forest fires. In 1925, the State of Vermont asked the National Forest Reserve Commission to evaluate the potential for establishing a national forest. The great

flood of 1927 further heightened the public's desire to create a national forest. Surveyors established the GMNF boundary in 1929; likely sellers began to be identified in 1930; and President Herbert Hoover signed the proclamation establishing the GMNF in 1932.

Characterized by striking scenery that combines rugged mountain peaks with quintessential Vermont villages, the Forest is an attraction for nearby residents and visitors, alike. The GMNF signifies a multiple-use ethic through its role of providing ecological and science-based forest stewardship, clean water, diverse vegetation, high-value, high-quality forest products, economical and educational contributions, and trail-based backcountry recreation.

Located within a day's drive of over 70 million people, the GMNF is a destination for visitors seeking a variety of recreational opportunities. The Forest includes three nationally designated trails: The Appalachian National Scenic Trail, Long National Recreation Trail, and the Robert Frost National Recreation Trail. The GMNF also includes three alpine ski areas, six Nordic ski areas, and approximately 900 miles of multiple use trails for hiking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, horseback riding, and mountain biking. In addition to recreational opportunities, the Forest includes a variety of species of plants and animals. Northern hardwoods, softwoods, rare and unique plants, fish, birds, and numerous animals of all sizes are also part of the attraction for visitors.

The GMNF contributes to the area's overall economy through employment and program spending. Timber harvests provide economic benefit through local mills and processing facilities. The recreation programs provide benefit to the tourism industry in the area. The economy also benefits from National Forest System lands through values that are associated with the existence of public lands in an area, such as recreational opportunities, open space, wildlife habitats, clean water, and beautiful scenery.

## A Vision for the Future

The landscape of the GMNF is unique in New England, providing opportunities that are not generally available on private or other public lands. The Forest's resources are managed to ensure that their social and economic values to the region will benefit both present and future generations. Resources on the GMNF will be managed to conserve, protect, and produce what is desired by the public: wild places, clean water, outstanding fish and wildlife habitat, diverse recreation, and wood products. The public's desire to keep things natural and wild is balanced with human uses of the Forest. These present and future public desires are expressed in the 2006 Forest Plan's Role of the Forest and goals.

The mosaic of forested ecosystems that will be maintained or restored across the landscape will include natural communities in early, mid, and late successional states. This assortment of healthy ecosystems will contribute to species viability and biological diversity. The management prescribed in the 2006 Forest Plan will continue to preserve and enhance habitat in support of rare species and other species valued by Forest users, and the recovery of threatened, endangered, and sensitive (TES) species such as the Indiana bat and Atlantic salmon. Conservation and recovery of TES species remains one of the top priorities in our decision making. The ecological processes necessary to maintain the Forest's biological diversity will be provided across the landscape. Populations of native and desired non-native species of plants and animals will thrive and offer opportunities for viewing, hunting, and fishing. The Forest will continue to provide some of the highest quality aquatic habitats and water resources as well as some of the most natural appearing and scenic mountainous settings in New England.

The National Forest will be enjoyed for a wide range of high-quality recreational opportunities, mountain and forest scenery, and an extensive trail network. The Forest will provide a diversity of recreational opportunities, with special emphasis on primitive and semi-primitive settings. The Forest will continue to provide



opportunities for many recreational activities, including hiking, cross-country skiing, mountain biking, horseback riding, camping in developed and dispersed areas, driving for pleasure, winter motorized trail riding, Alpine skiing and snowboarding, swimming, boating, fishing, hunting, wildlife watching, natural and cultural resource interpretation, and other activities.

The wilderness areas of the GMNF will provide opportunities for solitude, and primitive and unconfined recreation. These opportunities will become more important as populations around the Forest grow. In addition, wilderness will provide significant ecological values by maintaining large unfragmented areas that will allow natural processes to predominate, will develop old growth characteristics over time, and will minimize the impacts of human intrusion.

The Forest will continue to provide high-quality hardwood and softwood sawtimber, as well as other forest products, primarily for local and regional markets. Sustainable forestry activities will occur on close to one half of the Forest in a manner that is compatible with other resource and recreation objectives. Commercial timber harvesting activities will play a key role in creating greater diversity in forest age classes, vegetation composition, and wildlife habitats.

Water quality, aquatic habitats, and soil productivity will be maintained and enhanced through restoration activities and the use of best management practices. Water resources will support a variety of uses, and watersheds

will maintain their natural hydrologic function. The long-term productivity of the Forest will be sustained.

Transportation networks and facilities will be maintained and provided to support the goals and objectives of the 2006 Forest Plan. Road networks will be managed to provide public access and safe travel.

Stewardship of the GMNF will continue to be a collaborative effort between local communities, Forest users, private sector entities, non-profit partners, and other government agencies. Many programs, facilities, and services that contribute to local and regional economies and the quality of life will be developed and implemented through partnerships, volunteer programs, cooperative agreements, and donations. Educational and interpretive programs will continue to deliver messages about natural and cultural history, land conservation, and multiple-use issues to local communities and Forest users.

Educational institutions, government agencies, and other entities will assist in determining research activities on the Forest. An ongoing monitoring and evaluation program will continue and will focus on how well the 2006 Forest Plan goals and objectives are achieved. Monitoring efforts will: identify the effects of management actions, evaluate how well the effects match the anticipated results, identify new information, and determine necessary changes to the 2006 Forest Plan to be made through amendments.

## Decision and Rationale

### Need for Change

The current GMNF Forest Plan was approved in 1987 and has been updated through nine amendments over the past 19 years. There are three primary reasons to revise the 1987 Forest Plan:

1. It has been over 15 years since the Regional Forester approved the 1987 Forest Plan.
2. Agency goals and objectives, along with other national guidance for strategic plans and programs, have changed.
3. New issues and trends have been identified that could change the management goals, management areas, standards, guidelines, and monitoring and evaluation strategy in the plan.

A critical element in identifying the most important areas needing change came through a series of public planning meetings in 1996 and 1997. The areas identified as needing change in 1996 and 1997 were verified through another set of public meetings in 2001 before the Notice of Intent to revise the Forest Plan was published in 2002.

The 15 Year Retrospective, a comprehensive analysis of the management situation, was published in 2002. The findings of this assessment as well as the issues identified by the public became the focus of the Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS for revising the 1987 Forest Plan, which was issued in May of 2002.

The 15 Year Retrospective and the comments received on the Notice of Intent led to the development of issues associated with revising the 1987 Forest Plan. Chapter 1 of the Final EIS describes the following key revision issues as those that were deemed major enough to require consideration of varied approaches in alternatives for the Revised Plan, and where the most far-reaching changes needed to be considered:

- Special Designations includes determining the appropriate mix of specially-designated areas to promote

ecological, social, and economic sustainability. This issue includes recommendations to Congress on wilderness designation, and allocation of lands to Ecological Special Areas, Recreation Special Areas, Research Natural Areas, and protection of rivers that are eligible for Wild, Scenic or Recreational River classification under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

- Biodiversity and Ecosystems Management includes providing for desired mixes of plant and animal species populations, natural communities, vegetation composition and age classes, wildlife habitats, and landscape patterns as well as contributing to habitat needed to ensure viable populations of native and desired non-native plant and animal populations.
- Social and Economic Concerns includes providing for a mix of quantitative and qualitative socio-economic benefits provided by the Forest to the public and neighboring communities.
- Recreation Management includes determining the appropriate mix of primitive, dispersed-use opportunities, more developed, higher density opportunities, and non-motorized and motorized trail use opportunities.
- Timber Management includes determining an appropriate level for timber harvesting, determining the role of timber harvesting, and establishing treatment methods for vegetation management.

We reviewed all sections of the 1987 Forest Plan and determined that many aspects of the Plan were working well and did not need substantial revision. The parts of the 1987 Forest Plan that did not need to be changed are incorporated into the 2006 Forest Plan.

## Decision Overview

I have selected a modified version of Alternative E (Alternative E Modified) as the GMNF 2006 Forest Plan. Alternative E from the Draft EIS was modified based on public comments, new information, and further investigation and analysis by Forest Service staff.

I chose Alternative E Modified because, in my judgment, it maximizes the net benefit to the public by:

- Restoring, enhancing, or maintaining ecological conditions that sustain biological diversity, contributing to species viability, and promoting the long-term health of the Forest
- Increasing the Forest's capability to provide diverse, high-quality recreation opportunities
- Contributing to the economic and social needs of people, cultures, and communities
- Providing sustainable and predictable levels of products and services
- Recognizing the relationship of the GMNF to other public and private lands in the area of influence
- Emphasizing adaptive management over the long-term
- Providing consistent direction to assist managers in project-level decisions in implementing the broader social, economic, and ecological goals of this revised Plan

I used six primary criteria for evaluating the alternatives.

**Criterion 1:** The extent to which the alternative contributes to ecological, social, and economic sustainability by providing desired values, products, and services.

**Criterion 2:** The extent to which the alternative contributes to the GMNF's capability to maintain, restore, and enhance the quality, amount, and distribution of habitats to contribute to viable and sustainable populations of native and desirable non-native plants and animals.

**Criterion 3:** The extent to which the alternative contributes to maintaining or restoring ecological processes and systems within desired ranges of variability, including a variety of native vegetation and stream channel types, and their patterns and structural components.

**Criterion 4:** The extent to which the alternative improves the capability to provide a diverse range of high-quality, sustainable recreation opportunities that complement those provided off National Forest System lands.

**Criterion 5:** The extent to which the alternative provides for a high quality and enduring resource of wilderness that represents ecosystems and natural processes unique to northeastern forests, and provides opportunities for solitude and unconfined recreation.

**Criterion 6:** The extent to which the alternative provides for a sustainable supply of forest products while providing for other resource benefits.

Key indicators of these criteria are displayed and discussed in Chapter 2 of the Final EIS. Further information about how I applied these criteria is in the section "Alternatives Considered in Detail" starting on page 39 of this Record of Decision.

My decision also considered how the alternatives addressed public comments, concerns of Forest Service staff, and national direction and policy. My decision to select Alternative E Modified as the 2006 Forest Plan was made in consideration of the analysis of effects disclosed in the Final EIS, the Biological

Opinion of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and is supported by the planning record in its entirety.

This decision applies only to National Forest System land within the boundaries of the GMNF. It does not apply to any other federal, State, county, municipal, or private lands. In making my decision however, I considered how likely future management of other ownerships might contribute to environmental effects resulting from the management of the GMNF.

The Final EIS documents the analysis of a wide variety of alternatives with different outcomes and with varying management area (MA) allocations. These alternatives represent various ways of addressing Forest Plan revision issues. Each alternative meets the intent of relevant laws, including the Multiple Use Management Act, under which the national forests are managed. The 2006 Forest Plan allocates National Forest System land in the following manner (Table 1):

**Table 1 – Management Area Allocations for the GMNF 2006 Forest Plan**

Management Area (MA)	Alternative E Modified	
	Acres	% of National Forest System Lands
Diverse Forest Use	118,717	30%
Diverse Backcountry	59,665	15%
Remote Wildlife Habitat	30,399	8%
Escarpment	14,436	4%
Remote Backcountry	30,930	8%
Wilderness	59,001	15%
Wilderness Study Areas	27,473	7%
National Recreation Area	22,758	6%
Appalachian Trail	13,629	3%
Long Trail	2,640	1%
Recreation Special Areas	157	<1%
Moosalamoo Recreation & Education Area	12,375	3%
Alpine Ski Areas	2,889	1%
Alpine Ski Area Expansion	518	<1%
Research and Candidate Research Natural Areas	471	<1%
Ecological Special Areas	3,928	1%
Alpine/Subalpine Special Area	706	<1%
Eligible Wild, Scenic, or Recreational Rivers <sup>1</sup>	24,743	6%
<b>Total National Forest System Acres</b>	<b>400,692</b>	
<sup>1</sup> Management Area applies to stream corridors (1/4 mile each side of stream) which overlay and run through all other management areas.		

## Decision Summary and Rationale

I recognize that since the 1987 Forest Plan was completed there have been many changes in our country and the world that ultimately could affect the GMNF and all of the nation's forest lands. Changes in our understanding of ecological systems and the potential management needs to address new concerns also require us to look beyond our borders to ensure we are making the best possible decisions for the future. When developing the 2006 Forest Plan, issues such as non-native invasive species, air quality, acid deposition, forest fragmentation, wildlife habitat, species viability, and new recreational demands required substantial consideration. In addition, we paid close attention to how Forest Service management actions contribute to or complement what is happening on other lands within our sphere of influence. In examining the issues discussed in the Final EIS, I have selected Alternative E Modified with the understanding that this selected alternative for the Revised Plan outlines the following approaches relative to the five major issue areas.

### Special Designations

Designations such as Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers, Wilderness, National Recreation Areas, Ecological Special Areas, Recreation Special Areas, and Research Natural Areas, among others, are allocations of lands to specific uses, some requiring congressional designation. These specially designated lands may not allow for, or may have reduced levels of, timber and wildlife management and may limit some forms of recreational access. Many of these specially designated areas provide areas where natural processes predominate, where there is minimal human intervention, and where there are opportunities for more primitive recreation. Many people have expressed concern over the amount of land recommended for designation, particularly wilderness. This topic has received significant public attention and debate with people calling for a wide range of desired outcomes.

I have consulted closely and regularly with the staff of the GMNF and have given much thought to the recommendation for additional wilderness. I fully recognize the keen public interest as well as the prolonged and divided debate surrounding this issue in Vermont. In my judgment, the selected alternative does the best job of providing high-quality wilderness while still accommodating other uses of the Forest.

The Wilderness Act of 1964, and the subsequent Eastern Wilderness Act of 1975 and Vermont Wilderness Act of 1984, have demonstrated the will of the people to have some federal lands set aside that could be managed toward an untrammeled state. With increasing development in the East, and the desire of people to reconnect to places that are in a more wild condition and removed from human civilization, it is reasonable for me to recommend additional lands to be considered by Congress for wilderness designation. This is particularly true in light of the addition of over 90,000 acres to the Forest since the 1987 Forest Plan was developed. I am proud of the prominent role that wilderness plays in the context of the overall Forest Service Mission, and I recognize the importance this has for the particular role played by the GMNF.

I also recognize and respect the special role that Congress plays in enacting legislation to permanently establish these areas as wilderness. Forest Service staff have done their utmost to carefully and fairly inventory and evaluate opportunities for future, high-quality wilderness additions to the Forest. I have used this information and have applied my best judgment, fully recognizing that the Forest Service's role is to provide a recommendation to Congress through the Forest Plan revision process. It is ultimately the role and responsibility of our elected representatives in Congress, as expressed through the Wilderness Act, to determine the final outcome in this particular matter.

My decision recommends to Congress a total of 27,473 acres of Wilderness Study Area. If designated by Congress, this would represent a 46 percent increase above the current 59,001

acres previously established. This includes 22,425 acres in the recommended Glastenbury Wilderness Study Area, a potential new wilderness, plus 5,048 acres of additions to the existing Breadloaf, Big Branch, Peru Peak, and Lye Brook Wilderness Areas. If enacted, the recommended additions would result in approximately 22 percent of the Forest being managed permanently as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. My recommendation includes 8,345 acres that were part of the newly acquired land management area (9.2) in the 1987 Forest Plan.

In my judgment, the areas recommended have the highest potential for future management as high-quality wilderness. This is evidenced by Alternative E Modified having the highest percentage (48%) of lands recommended as Wilderness Study Areas from the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum inventory class of semi-primitive non-motorized. The ROS inventory provides a good indicator of relative remoteness and potential solitude, which are the qualities the Forest Service seeks to promote in wilderness management. From a future management perspective, I also believe these areas can be most successfully managed so as to maintain and enhance their wilderness characteristics over time.

Furthermore, the 22,425 acre recommended Glastenbury Wilderness Study Area is a remote area that is a portion of the largest inventoried roadless area on the GMNF. The recommended area's large, rectangular configuration located away from roads provides excellent opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. Special features of the Glastenbury area recommended for Wilderness Study include a six mile segment of the Appalachian Trail, Little Pond Ecological Special Area, numerous ridgelines and vistas, and eligible scenic and recreational river segments. Additions to existing wilderness areas have also been recommended to improve boundary management.

This recommendation would not close any existing snowmobile trails, most notably those in the Glastenbury vicinity where the Forest

Service manages some remote, non-machine groomed trails. These trails access the high elevation areas of Glastenbury Mountain, a unique recreation opportunity found on the GMNF and in Vermont.

My recommendation has relatively minimal impacts to lands considered suitable for commercial timber management. A total of 12,262 acres would be removed from the land base considered suitable for commercial timber production if this recommendation for Wilderness Study is adopted by Congress.

I have reviewed the Roadless Inventory completed by the GMNF staff to ensure that the inventory and evaluation process used is consistent with national and regional guidelines. The focus of this inventory and evaluation was to identify lands that meet the criteria for inclusion in the Forest's roadless inventory, and to evaluate whether any of these areas should be recommended to Congress as wilderness.

Some groups and individuals, in their comments on the Draft EIS, disagreed with the process that was used to inventory and evaluate roadless areas. I believe the process followed is sound, and did result in an accurate inventory and a thorough evaluation. There were also questions about our determination of which roads were considered "improved" for the purpose of the inventory. A review was conducted between the Draft and Final EIS and Plan which resulted in the addition of 6,730 acres to the roadless inventory and evaluation. These additions resulted in modifications to Alternative E as displayed in the Final EIS and this Record of Decision.

Alternative E Modified includes the allocation of 29,645 acres to special area MAs, including Recreation Special Areas, Research Natural Areas (RNA) including candidate RNAs, Alpine/subalpine Areas, Ecological Special Areas, and the new Green Mountain Escarpment MA and Moosalamoo Recreation and Education Area MA. The careful analysis conducted during this plan revision has resulted in the identification of these special areas and the protection of their unique attributes. New areas have been added and some areas

identified in the 1987 Forest Plan have been expanded or connected to enhance the ecosystems.

Sixty-one ecologically significant features were identified through a special area assessment. All but two of these features, those considered too small for special area management, were assigned to management areas specifically designed to maintain the values of the significant feature. Fifty-two of these areas are allocated to management areas that are dominated by natural processes and will move to old growth characteristics over time. The number of acres allocated to the Ecological Special Areas (ESA) management area has increased from 796 acres in the 1987 Forest Plan to 3,928 acres in the 2006 Forest Plan. This increase in the ESA management area includes two areas identified as candidate Research Natural Areas in the 1987 Plan that did meet the evaluation criteria required for designation as a Research Natural Area.

The Green Mountain Escarpment is a newly established management area that emphasizes restoration of the oak/pine ecosystem found on the western slopes of the Green Mountain Range. Fifty-one percent of the existing oak and oak/pine stands on the Forest are allocated to the Escarpment management area in the 2006 Forest Plan. At 14,436 acres, Alternative E Modified offers the second highest acreage designated to the Escarpment management area of the alternatives considered in detail.

Alternative E Modified also establishes the 12,375 acre Moosalamoo Recreation and Education Area management area. Management for this area will showcase multiple-use management by providing a focus on public use, recreation, ecologically-oriented tourism, interpretation, education, and the protection of special ecological, cultural, historical, and recreational values. This special designation will enhance our ability to provide a unique opportunity to educate visitors, local residents, and school children through service learning and through the focused demonstration of sustainable forest management, wildlife habitat enhancement, and other practices.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (WSRA) of 1968, as amended, protects congressionally designated rivers' free flowing condition, water quality, and outstanding remarkable values for the "benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations." Through the Forest Plan revision process, the required study to identify rivers eligible for future designation as a part of the national system of Wild, Scenic, and Recreational (WSR) rivers was completed. This process determined that 20 rivers are eligible for study to determine suitability for potential designation by Congress. In the 1987 Forest Plan, eleven rivers were considered eligible and an additional 38 streams were named "significant streams." These 38 streams have been managed consistent with requirements for management of congressionally designated recreational rivers. The eligibility study determined that five of the previously identified "significant streams" met eligibility criteria for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The remaining 33 will continue to be protected through the 2006 Forest Plan's overall management direction.

River segments that were located in lands acquired since the approval of the 1987 Forest Plan were also studied to determine eligibility for inclusion in the national system. Four of these rivers were listed in the original Nationwide Rivers Inventory conducted by the National Park Service. We reviewed these rivers and found that they are eligible for inclusion in the national system.

Appendix D of the Final EIS documents the findings of the eligibility study. The 2006 Forest Plan includes a management area (9.4) that provides managers with clear direction for protecting the values of the eligible river segments to retain their eligibility for potential future congressional designation.

### **Biodiversity and Ecosystem Management**

The protection of biological diversity through ecosystem management is an important issue addressed through this plan revision. My decision related to biological diversity and ecosystem management is based on a wealth



Peregrine Falcon Chicks

of scientific information on ecological processes and functions, as well as the most current information about the natural communities found within the ecological regions of Vermont. The programmatic direction of the 2006 Forest Plan will allow for adjustment of the vegetation patterns, forest structure, vegetative composition, and species composition on the Forest over time, resulting in vegetative communities that are healthy, sustainable, diverse, and designed to maintain or improve the viability of plant and animal species most at risk.

An important change provided in the 2006 Forest Plan is the addition of an objective to manage five percent of each ecological type on the GMNF for old growth characteristics as part of an ecological reference network. This

change is intended to conserve representative types of each ecological system in conditions where natural processes dominate. GMNF staff used a conservation planning model to assist in analyzing alternatives for meeting this objective. In the 2006 Forest Plan, 44 percent of the Forest will be managed in a way that allows old growth forest characteristics to develop over time. This percentage includes lands allocated to management areas with minimal human disturbance (36 percent) and other lands classified as unsuitable for timber production (8 percent) found within management areas that otherwise allow for active vegetation management. Much of this land is in large, contiguous interior forest areas where changes to forest composition and structure will occur primarily through natural processes such as wind, ice storms, fire, and insect and disease outbreaks. Alternative E Modified allocates at least ten percent of all twenty-two

Ecological Land Unit Groups and at least 15 percent of all land type associations found on the Forest to management areas that will have minimal human disturbance and will allow for development of old growth conditions over time. This will provide for a network of ecological reference areas that span a representation of landforms, elevation zones, aspect, slope, and land cover found on the Forest.

In addition, the 2006 Forest Plan emphasizes the maintenance and restoration of habitats including aspen/birch, oak communities, and permanent upland openings through sustainable forestry practices. The 2006 Forest Plan provides opportunities for enhancement of these vegetation types. A new management area, the Green Mountain Escarpment, has been developed to emphasize the maintenance and restoration of the drier oak-pine community



found along the western slope of the Forest, a relatively uncommon natural community important to particular plant and animal populations. Four percent (14,436 acres) of the Forest is allocated to this management area.

I agree with those who said in their comments that the GMNF should provide a greater diversity of habitats, especially early successional, permanent openings, and young forests. Research has shown that the amount of these habitats is decreasing in New England. Five management areas classified as generally suitable for timber production will provide opportunities to increase regenerating and young age classes on the GMNF that will result in providing greater vegetative age class diversity. Fifty-nine percent of the GMNF (235,592 acres) are allocated to these five management areas.

The Forest Service received a great deal of public interest and input during Forest Plan revision regarding the concept of managing part of the Forest to emphasize a mix of different-aged forest habitats through active vegetation management while de-emphasizing recreation uses that may disturb some wildlife species. What emerged from this dialogue is the development of the Remote Wildlife Habitat (RWH) management area. The major emphasis of the RWH management area is to provide a mix of different-aged forest habitats, from early succession to old forests, for the primary benefit of diverse wildlife species, including reclusive wildlife species such as black bears and bobcats. This management area will provide diverse habitat conditions while retaining the remote characteristics of the area. Reclusive species should benefit from this type of management, but the management area was not intended exclusively for their benefit. The creation of permanent and temporary openings will provide early successional habitat for many species including bobcats, black bear, northern goshawk, and white-tailed deer. The management area also provides excellent opportunities for mast tree management in more remote areas. Many of the more significant bear travel corridors and stands of mast tree species are included in the Remote Wildlife Habitat management area.

Alternative E Modified gives significant emphasis to this management direction by allocating eight percent of the Forest to this management area. Remote habitats are also provided in other areas including the White Rocks National Recreation Area, Wilderness, Remote Backcountry Forest, recommended Wilderness Study Areas, Research Natural Areas, and Special Areas. The 2006 Forest Plan allocates 171,837 acres (43 percent of the GMNF) to these management areas. This is a substantial change in emphasis from the 1987 Forest Plan which provided 90,645 acres (23 percent) in this type of management.

The maintenance and protection of deer wintering areas was also expressed as a habitat concern by the public. The 1987 Forest Plan provided specific management areas for deer wintering areas. This management allocation did not always match the deer wintering areas mapped by the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department or the areas with actual deer winter use. The 2006 Forest Plan provides greater flexibility for the management of deer wintering areas through Forest-wide standards and guidelines for the management of this habitat type. The 2006 Forest Plan allocates 67 percent of the mapped deer wintering areas to management areas that prescribe active vegetation management that is important to improve these habitats. This is a slight increase over the 1987 Forest Plan's allocation of 63 percent of the mapped deer wintering areas to management areas with vegetation management opportunities.

The 2006 Forest Plan recognizes the serious threat to forest health from non-native invasive species and provides a programmatic framework for addressing this challenge. The 1987 Forest Plan had very little direction related to non-native invasive species. The spread of invasive species is one of the major threats facing the Forest; thus the new management direction provided by the 2006 Forest Plan places emphasis upon preventing new introductions and gradually reducing established populations of invasive species.

The changes made in the 2006 Forest Plan for watershed health including riparian and wetland

protection, wildlife reserve trees (including Indiana bat protection), and protection of other rare and unique features were included in all alternatives. Provisions for addressing these needs are included in goals, objectives, standards, and/or guidelines. Therefore, my decision with respect to these concerns was less between alternatives, and more on what changes would be made to all alternatives.

### **Social and Economic Concerns**

Alternative E Modified provides a balanced approach contributing to community social values and economic concerns by addressing the public's desire for a mix of uses that are also geographically well distributed across the Forest. The 2006 Forest Plan offers more opportunities for providing timber and other forest products as well as wilderness and tourism-related activities, particularly when compared to the 1987 Forest Plan. I believe that, based on my evaluation of all alternatives considered, Alternative E Modified provides the greatest net public benefit, and that the ecological, social, and economic components of sustainability will all benefit from this decision.

Concerns have been repeatedly raised by State of Vermont and town government officials, non-governmental organizations, landowners, and the public regarding the inability of the Forest Service to allocate newly acquired lands to appropriate management in a timely manner. The 1987 Forest Plan contained a Newly Acquired Lands management area (9.2) in which these lands were placed under custodial management until studies would be done to determine their desired future condition. More than 90,000 acres of land have been added to the GMNF since the early 1980s. These lands remained, in essence, in a "holding pattern" until this Plan revision. The 2006 Forest Plan eliminates the Newly Acquired Land management area and future lands that are acquired will be immediately allocated to the management areas in which these lands reside.

I agree that it is appropriate to pre-designate non-National Forest System lands within the GMNF Proclamation Boundary as outlined in Option 2 in Appendix G of the Final EIS. This

approach provides advanced knowledge to the public as to how the Forest Service would manage individual tracts of land, during the life of the 2006 Forest Plan, if acquisition were ever to occur. The pre-designation of non-federal land is shown in Proclamation Boundary management area allocation Map in Appendix F of the 2006 Forest Plan. Following acquisition, a site-specific analysis will be conducted before any management activities occur on these lands. If new information indicates there are unique attributes not previously considered in the Proclamation Boundary mapping analysis, the Forest Service may amend the 2006 Forest Plan at any time to assign the most appropriate management area designation. My decision in no way alters acquisition priorities or the form of consultation that the Forest Service conducts with town and State government regarding proposed acquisitions. Nor does my decision identify any specific tracts of private land for acquisition. The Forest Service will continue to acquire land on a willing seller basis.

### **Recreation Management**

The GMNF is a popular recreation and tourism destination for people living in Vermont as well as those visiting from the Northeast and from throughout the nation and the world. Recreation and tourism within Vermont are important to the State, regional, and local economies. The GMNF helps support year-round resorts as well as the smaller independent businesses that provide personalized services to the tourism economy. The GMNF plays an important role by providing predominantly natural settings and nature-based recreation opportunities that visitors expect when vacationing in New England and that contribute to the quality of life for local residents.

In my judgment, Alternative E Modified achieves the desired balance of providing motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities. This balance meets the 2006 Forest Plan goal of providing a diverse range of high-quality and sustainable recreational opportunities that complement those off National Forest System lands.

The 2006 Forest Plan maintains the GMNF's existing focus on dispersed recreation, with its trail-based backcountry recreation opportunities being one of its greatest assets. Public comments expressed a desire for areas that provide both non-motorized recreational opportunities and areas that provide motorized trail use opportunities. The 2006 Forest Plan moves the Forest to a range of recreation settings that are well aligned with the desires of the public and the niche of the Forest. Areas managed to provide semi-primitive non-motorized and primitive recreation experiences, as measured by the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS), increase from the 1987 Plan's 28 percent to 43 percent in the 2006 Plan. Another 24 percent of the land will be managed to provide a semi-primitive motorized setting, allowing motorized trail use in a more remote setting. This provides for 67 percent of the land to be managed for remote and less developed recreational settings, an increase from the 62 percent managed for these types of settings in the 1987 Forest Plan. This shift to more remote recreational opportunities is consistent with the Forest's recreation niche. The GMNF's large blocks of contiguous publicly-owned land provide an uncommon opportunity for these types of remote recreation settings. The 2006 Forest Plan also provides for a diversity of trail uses within the Forest's settings including motorized uses, hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, horseback riding, and dog sledding.

The 2006 Forest Plan maintains the current developed recreation facilities, including ski areas. The size and number of developed recreation facilities are not expected to increase during the next ten to fifteen years.

Two important recreational areas on the GMNF are the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (AT) and the Long National Recreation Trail (LT). The 2006 Forest Plan features additional protections for the AT and the LT by placing the corridors of these trails into specific management areas, each with their own distinct management direction. The boundary of the AT management area now includes all areas mapped as the foreground area visible from the

trail and with a minimum corridor width of 500 feet on each side of the footpath.

In the last three years, the Chief of the Forest Service has focused attention on the importance of national forests managing the use of summer off-highway vehicles (referred to as summer off-road vehicles (ORVs) in the 2006 Forest Plan and Final EIS). Although summer ORVs include many types of recreational vehicles, public concern for our plan revision focused on all-terrain vehicle (ATV) use. For the purpose of my discussion, I am considering ATV impacts under the broader heading of summer ORV concerns. While summer ORV use is considered an appropriate use on National Forests, the damage caused by unmanaged summer ORV use has become an increasing concern nationwide. I have worked throughout the Eastern Region to ensure that we carefully manage summer ORV use consistent with national policy. Based upon local conditions and their overall recreational niche, I have determined that some National Forests within the Eastern Region can provide summer ORV trail opportunities while others should not.

The 1987 Forest Plan provided very little direction to guide managers pertaining to summer ORV use. While the 1987 Forest Plan allowed for the Forest Service to consider development of summer ORV trails, it offered little specific guidance for managers on parameters for this use. To date, the Forest Service has not developed or designated any summer ORV trails on the GMNF. In the nineteen years since the 1987 Forest Plan was adopted, summer ORV use, particularly that by ATVs, has risen dramatically in Vermont and nationwide.

We received a substantial number of comments on the use of summer ORVs on the GMNF. I recognize that many groups and individuals believe that the use of summer ORVs should be prohibited on the Forest. It was also clear that many commenters misinterpreted the Proposed Revised Forest Plan as a broad and expansive opening of the Forest to summer ORV use. The Proposed Revised Forest Plan restricted future consideration of summer ORV trails to

connecting links and those connecting links could be located on only a portion of the GMNF. In fact, this significantly narrowed the potential consideration of future summer ORV trail development as compared to the 1987 Forest Plan, which did not contain any language limiting the type of trail system. We share the concerns of those who fear the potential for resource damage and conflicts with other recreation users if summer ORV trails were developed on the GMNF. The 2006 Forest Plan contains standards and guidelines limiting the extent of any summer ORV trail and requires support from a partner group in order to prevent such impacts.

The Proposed Revised Forest Plan limited the consideration of future summer ORV trail development solely to those trails which would provide connecting links for trail systems largely located off National Forest System lands. No stand alone or self-contained summer ORV trails or trail systems would be developed on the Forest. This proposal was influenced, in part, by the recommendations offered by the ATV Collaborative Group convened by the Governor of Vermont in 2004. The Forest Service, as well as varied interests, participated in that effort. While the Collaborative Group's recommendations were not a consensus of all the participants, and the Forest Service had made it clear from the beginning that it would not be bound by the Group's final recommendations, the effort did help inform the Plan revision process.

After careful consideration, I have decided that the 2006 Forest Plan will allow for future consideration of connecting trails that link a larger summer ORV trail system contained primarily off National Forest System lands. I envision the future role of the GMNF to be minor, if and when, this larger trail system is eventually developed in Vermont. The standards and guidelines in the 2006 Forest Plan have been clarified to assist managers as they consider the appropriateness and feasibility of future trail proposals. This Record of Decision (ROD) does not authorize the construction of any specific summer ORV trails or access nor does it make any site-specific determinations regarding summer ORV use on

the Forest. The Forest-wide standards and guidelines found in the 2006 Forest Plan merely allow for the Forest Service to consider proposals in the future, and state the conditions that must be met if such a trail is eventually proposed.

I recognize the unique role the GMNF plays in providing a diverse range of high-quality and sustainable recreation opportunities that complement those found off National Forest lands. I believe this limited consideration of future summer ORV use is consistent with this goal and believe it is appropriate to allow this use to be considered under specific circumstances. I also believe that the cautious approach outlined in the 2006 Forest Plan affords the Forest Service the ability to test this use in the future and to adapt or further restrict summer ORV use depending upon site-specific management experience.

### **Timber Management**

The GMNF was established from lands of which the majority had been heavily cutover, grazed, farmed, and later abandoned. Due to the ecological resilience of Vermont's forestlands, Forest Service management, and public support for sustainable management and public ownership, the GMNF has demonstrated the value of sustainable forestry practices. The GMNF has shown water quality, biological diversity and desired wildlife habitat can be restored and the forest can provide outstanding scenery and the highest quality recreation, while at the same time supplying highly valued wood and other forest products to support local and regional economies.

The 1987 Forest Plan stated that timber management would be used to maintain and enhance vegetative diversity, wildlife habitats, vistas, and the health and condition of the forest ecosystem, as well as produce high-quality sawtimber. Under that Forest Plan, timber harvesting was also used as a tool to achieve recreation, visual, wildlife, timber, forest health, and other objectives. Over the past 19 years the amount of timber harvested on the GMNF has been well below that necessary to achieve goals, objectives, and desired future conditions.

Of particular concern is that Forest Plan objectives that rely on timber management (such as the creation of habitat diversity for wildlife species) have not been met.

I believe the 2006 Forest Plan will provide the management direction needed to have an effective timber management program that will contribute to the economic vitality of local communities and the wood products industry both in Vermont and throughout New England. Although many factors will continue to influence actual timber harvest levels from year to year, I am confident that the improved determination of lands that are classified as suitable for timber production, and the accompanying calculation of the Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) for timber provided by the 2006 Forest Plan gives us the most reliable projection possible of the timber production capability of the GMNF.

Commercial timber harvesting will continue to play a key role in providing multiple benefits on the GMNF and the goals, objectives, and desired future conditions stated in the 2006 Plan. The Forest Service will continue to use silvicultural treatments that favor the production of high-quality sawtimber, the creation of a diversity of wildlife habitats, and the creation of vegetation composition and age class distributions that is closer to natural tendencies.

The 2006 Forest Plan provides for an Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) of 164 million board feet (MMBF) for the first decade (an annual average of 16.4 million board feet). The ASQ for Alternative A, the no action Alternative is 13.8 MMBF which is 1.8 MMBF less than the original ASQ calculated in the 1987 Plan for the same lands. The determination of which land were classified as suitable for timber production, and the ASQ calculations were derived using the best available mapping techniques, updated vegetation and land status data, incorporating revised standards and guidelines into the analysis, and knowledge gained from years of implementing the 1987 Forest Plan. The increase from the 1987 Forest Plan original ASQ calculation (an annual average of 15.6 million board feet) to the 2006 Forest Plan (an annual average of 16.4 million board feet) is largely due to the addition of more than 90,000

acres of newly acquired land to the GMNF since the mid-1980s. Of these new lands, 73,494 acres have been allocated to management areas that allow commercial timber harvesting and 75 percent (55,058 acres) of these lands are suitable for commercial timber harvesting.

In making my decision, I recognize there is a high level of concern over the amount of timber harvesting done on the GMNF. Some members of the public questioned the reliability of the models used in estimating the ASQ, believing the ASQ should have been far higher or far lower. Some of this concern may be due to a misunderstanding of what ASQ means. Simply put, ASQ is an upper ceiling on the amount of timber that may be sustainably harvested over time. It is not a guarantee or commitment to sell that particular amount over the next decade. The ASQ is based on the amount of timber harvest volume that would result from fully implementing the 2006 Forest Plan objectives over the next decade. Actual harvest may be less depending on annual budgets and site-specific factors encountered during project development. I believe the 2006 Forest Plan ASQ represents an adequate picture of the overall potential for the GMNF to produce timber outputs while at the same time meeting goals and objectives for other resources. The models we used also provided the necessary assurance that the Forest will be managed for a sustainable, non-declining flow of wood products over the long-term.

The 2006 Forest Plan classifies 189,616 acres of land as suitable for timber production within management areas that provide for active timber management (approximately 47% of the Forest's land base). Management areas that have lands classified as suitable are Diverse Forest Use, Diverse Backcountry, Remote Wildlife Habitat, the Green Mountain Escarpment, and the Moosalamoo Recreation and Education Area management areas. These lands are capable of producing commercial volumes of timber on a sustained basis, and these are the areas where regularly scheduled timber harvest will occur. Forty-five percent (85,226 acres) of the total acres considered suitable for timber production are on

the most highly productive lands found on the Forest.

The 2006 Forest Plan provides management direction for selecting the appropriate vegetation management actions at the site-specific level to achieve desired conditions. This direction provides greater flexibility in selecting the appropriate treatments and allows adaptive management to be practiced.

The 2006 Forest Plan also identifies the proportion of probable methods of timber harvest (16 U.S.C. 1604(f)(2)), but does not decide when, where, or how timber harvest will occur at any particular site-specific location.

The 2006 Forest Plan's proposed and probable management practices call for 4,055 acres of annual commercial timber harvesting (approximately one percent of the Forest) during the first decade using a variety of silvicultural treatments. The 2006 Forest Plan focuses timber harvesting in those areas accessible by the existing road system. A minimum of 20 percent of the suitable timber base is to be managed using uneven-aged silvicultural treatments to create multi-aged conditions. The final determination of the appropriateness of even-aged or uneven-aged management is a site-specific determination. Such determinations are better made at the project level of decision-making based on site-specific resource information.

Some commenters were concerned that timber harvest could compound soil and water quality impacts occurring on the Forest due to acid deposition. I asked Forest Service staff to provide additional information in the Final EIS that would assist me in understanding the concerns related to this important issue. I also asked that they discuss the issue with Forest Service and other researchers to ensure we have a full understanding of the best available scientific information on this subject. While the effects of acid deposition are a concern throughout the world for both health and ecological reasons, I do not believe the body of available scientific information supports the theory that continuing timber harvest in Vermont will have a significant effect on overall

soil productivity or water quality. Lands that are designated in the 2006 Forest Plan as "suitable for timber production" can be harvested, under the standards and guidelines required by the Plan, in a way that will maintain the long-term soil productivity of the land and water quality of Forest streams. Proposed timber harvest projects will undergo site-specific environmental analysis to ensure that land productivity and ecological processes are not compromised. The Green Mountain National Forest is committed to continuing to work with Forest personnel, researchers, and partner groups to monitor the effects from acid deposition to ensure this issue continues to be monitored and changes in the plan are made as necessary.

I recognize there are interest groups and individuals who believe the GMNF should substantially curtail or eliminate all commercial timber sales. The sale of timber products is an appropriate use of National Forest System lands as authorized by various federal laws including the Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960 and National Forest Management Act of 1976. Timber sales have been an integral part of the resource conservation practices on the GMNF since the mid-1930s. Timber sales are often an efficient, effective, and sometimes the only means to move toward the desired conditions for vegetation on the landscape. In fact, many of the vegetation species composition and age class distribution objectives are achieved through vegetation management resulting from timber sales. The analysis documented in the Final EIS shows that the GMNF is capable of providing forest products in an environmentally sustainable manner while providing many other Forest resource benefits that are necessary to achieve 2006 Forest Plan goals and objectives. Lastly, I made this decision recognizing the preferences of some groups and individuals, but also realizing that the commercial timber harvest on National Forest System lands is desirable.

### **Overall Conclusions**

The decision to select Alternative E Modified was heavily influenced by the public input received during the Plan revision process. I made this decision based on the Green

Mountain National Forest Supervisor's careful review of public comments, analysis of effects as documented in the Final EIS, consideration of a broad range of alternatives, and frequent in-depth consultation with the staff of the GMNF. I believe this decision is based on the best available scientific assessments and most current scientific knowledge. It considers all new information provided by the public, State, and other federal agencies during the revision process, and is made with particular concern for the use of high-quality resource data. I believe this 2006 Forest Plan provides the best mix of resource uses and opportunities to provide for public needs and desires within the framework

of existing laws, regulations, policies, and capabilities of the land.

It is my belief that this decision responds best to the evaluation criteria described on page 11 of the ROD and the Need for Change items described in Chapter 1 of the Final EIS. Implementing the 2006 Forest Plan will provide the best blend of products, services, and values for the public and will improve the sustainability and ecosystem health on the GMNF. I believe the ecological, social, and economic components of sustainability will all benefit from this decision.

Lake in Winter



## Changes to the Forest Plan between the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements

We received over 10,000 responses to our Draft EIS and the Proposed Revised Forest Plan. Based on the comments received, I have made a number of changes to the Proposed Revised Forest Plan, and incorporated them into the 2006 Forest Plan. The 2006 Forest Plan is a modification of Alternative E and is called Alternative E Modified in the Final EIS.

The changes to Alternative E in the Draft EIS and to the Proposed Revised Forest Plan range from minor edits and clarifications to changes in management area allocations, goals and objectives, standards and guidelines, management area direction, and monitoring requirements. Some changes resulted from data corrections and field verification. These changes are reflected in the Final EIS and 2006 Forest Plan for the GMNF. The following summary describes the major changes made between the Draft EIS and Final EIS.

### CHANGES TO MANAGEMENT AREA ALLOCATIONS

#### Diverse Forest Use

Changes to the Diverse Forest Use management area increased this allocation from 116,737 acres (29%) to 118,717 acres (30%). The changes in the Diverse Forest Use management area allocations are:

##### ***Bingo Brook Area***

The Bingo Brook area has been changed from a Diverse Backcountry (DB) management area to Diverse Forest Use (DFU) management area. This area has historically been harvested, is very accessible, roaded, and has much recreational use. The Bingo Brook area is adjacent to a large block of DFU management area. With the removal of the DB management area across the ridge, as described in the Monastery Mountain area changes, I have decided that management

would be enhanced and potential conflicts would be reduced by creating a larger block of DFU management area to include the Bingo Brook area.

##### ***Trues' Store Snowmobile Access***

We received public comment that the snowmobile access to Trues' Store from the VAST Trail near Little Pond in Woodford would have to be closed in the draft Preferred Alternative to be consistent with Remote Backcountry Forest management direction. Forest Service staff determined that this trail is also under a powerline corridor with an associated Special Use Permit. The area south of and including the powerline corridor in Woodford has been changed to a DFU management area to accommodate these two uses.

#### Remote Backcountry Forest

Changes to the Remote Backcountry Forest (RBF) management area decrease this allocation from 32,763 acres (8%) to 30,930 acres (8%). The changes to the RBF management area are:

##### ***Monastery Mountain Area***

The Forest Service staff conducted field reconnaissance in the Diverse Backcountry (DB) management area that bisects the Remote Backcountry Forest (RBF) management area in the Monastery Mountain area. The DB management area corridor was allocated in the Preferred Alternative to allow for the possibility of a locally proposed east-west snowmobile corridor connecting the east side of the Green Mountain ridgeline with the VAST trails on the west side of the ridge. FS staff sited, hiked, and GPS located an approximate location for this trail that maintained the lowest gradient possible to cross the ridgeline. FS engineering staff then made a very preliminary estimate for the construction of a snowmobile trail. The estimated cost was \$382,000. Based on the cost, steep slopes, and intensity of construction methods that would be necessary for this trail to be built, FS staff recommended that the trail would be out of character with the area and impractical to construct and maintain. Public comment received, most notably from the



Green Mountain Club, also stated concerns about this potential snowmobile corridor, and a desire to have this area in a non-motorized use management area. Based on this information, the corridor has been changed from Diverse Backcountry management area to Remote Backcountry Forest. This change will provide greater protection to the Long Trail and create a large area of RBF management area along the ridge of the Green Mountains.

#### ***Dorset Mountain Area***

We received comments regarding the fact that we did not reach the stated 2006 Forest Plan objective to have 5% of all ecological types in an ecological reference network in the Preferred Alternative, and that future motorized use on Dorset Mountain was not desirable. We met the 5% ecological reference network objective in Alternative D by allocating Dorset Mountain to the RBF management area. This area contains the rich transitional zone Ecological Land Unit Group (ELUG), the only ecological type that did not have at least 5% allocated to management that contributed to the ecological reference network. Further information has shown that the Dorset Mountain area has a semi-primitive non-motorized character and that much of the area is unsuitable for timber harvesting and is inaccessible. Based on this information, I have decided to change the Dorset Mountain area to the RBF management area.

The decrease in Remote Backcountry Forest is due to additions to the recommended Wilderness Study Areas in the Glastenbury area described subsequently.

#### **Remote Wildlife Habitat**

Changes to the Remote Wildlife Habitat MA increase this MA allocation from 28,571 acres (7%) to 30,399 acres (8%). The changes to Remote Wildlife Habitat are:

#### ***Somerset Reservoir Area***

We received extensive comments on the lands around Somerset Reservoir. There was a desire to have no motorized use and no timber harvesting, and to place all this area in either a recommended Wilderness Study Area or the

Remote Backcountry Forest (RBF) management area. Comments expressed concern over losing bear travel corridors in the Stratton, Dover, Somerset, and Wardsboro area over Route 100. Other comments discussed the importance of the north end of Somerset Reservoir as wildlife habitat, and the significant wetland complexes near the reservoir. The majority of the lands to the east of the reservoir are in Remote Wildlife Habitat (RWH) management areas but the area to the northeast of the reservoir was Diverse Forest Use management area in the Preferred Alternative. This northeastern area has been changed to RWH management area, making the National Forest System (NFS) lands on the east side of the reservoir contiguous RWH management. In making this change, I have considered the other uses around the reservoir on both NFS and non-NFS lands. The area around Somerset Reservoir has both motorized and non-motorized recreational use. Motor boats are also allowed on the reservoir at low speeds. Trans-Canada utility company owns most of the lands that directly surround Somerset Reservoir. These lands are governed by a 40-year Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license agreed to by numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as a permanent easement held by the Vermont Land Trust. The license allows motorized recreation, requires a forest management plan, wildlife habitat improvements and recreational improvements. A more restrictive management area designation was not considered appropriate based on these uses.

#### **Alpine Ski Areas**

The Alpine Ski Area MA (178 acres) adjacent to Haystack Mountain has been changed to the Diverse Forest Use management area. The area is not under ski area permit and is not needed as part of the Haystack Ski Area.

#### **Ecological Special Areas**

Changes to the Ecological Special Areas (ESA) management area increase this allocation from 3,556 acres (1%) to 3,928 acres (1%). The changes to Ecological Study Areas are:

**Grout Pond Area**

Comments were received about the reduction of the size of the ESA management area at Grout Pond. These comments stated a desire to keep this area non-motorized and without harvesting in order to maintain the ecological and recreational character. The small size of the Grout Pond ESA described and mapped in the Draft EIS was an error, and did not include a sufficient area to protect the ecological values of the south end of the pond. We have changed the Grout Pond ESA management area to extend to the height of land or trails around the pond. The Grout Pond ESA has increased from 121 acres in the draft Preferred Alternative to 424 acres in the Selected Alternative. The lands added to the Grout Pond ESA management area in the Selected Alternative were allocated to Diverse Forest Use management area in the draft Preferred Alternative.

**French Hollow Area**

Forest Service staff identified two new stands in the French Hollow area of Winhall with potential old growth characteristics. The Vermont Natural Heritage Program staff verified the existence of old growth characteristics in these stands. These stands, and additional stands connecting them to the French Hollow ESA management area, have been removed from the Diverse Forest Use management area and added to the French Hollow ESA management area already designated for old growth characteristics.

**Wilderness Study Areas**

Changes to the recommended Wilderness Study Area management area increase this MA allocation from 17,869 acres (4%) to 27,473 acres (7%). The changes to areas recommended as Wilderness Study Areas are:

**Glastenbury**

We received comments regarding the condition of the Forest Service roads in the Bolles Brook area of Glastenbury. A field investigation was conducted to verify the condition of Forest Service system roads during which we discovered that the roads in this area were not improved roads. Due to this new information, the Bolles Brook area was added to the

Glastenbury Inventoried Roadless Area. The area was evaluated for wilderness potential, particularly the area's potential to enhance the quality of the Glastenbury recommended Wilderness Study Area (WSA) management area. Based on this evaluation, I have decided to add the Bolles Brook area to the Glastenbury WSA management area. Once the area around Bolles Brook was added it provided an opportunity to extend the recommended Wilderness Study Area across the Appalachian Trail (AT). The Appalachian Trail Conservancy, who are partners in the management of the AT, stated in their comment letter that they supported the AT being in Wilderness. I have decided to extend the Glastenbury WSA across the AT to the east. This change adds 9,604 acres to the Glastenbury recommended Wilderness Study Area changing the size of this WSA management area from 12,767 acres to 22,425 acres.

**Blue Bank**

We received Forest Service staff comments on a WSA MA (Blue Bank Inventoried Roadless Area) on the west side of Breadloaf along FR 54. A private road access has been requested in this area because it is the only feasible access to a property. Making a minor boundary change by moving the boundary of the WSA management area from FR 54 to follow the stream east of FR 54 will allow for the needed access.

## CHANGES TO GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

### Goal 13

We received public comment on the scope of the wilderness management goal (Goal 13), suggesting that "preserve biotic communities" cannot happen because communities are dynamic and change, and therefore, they cannot be preserved. The wording in the goal has been changed to clarify the intent to preserve an enduring resource that represents ecosystems and natural processes unique to the northeastern forests.

### Objectives under Goal 2

The age class objectives have been clarified to be more consistent with desired conditions. The age class objective table has been revised so that the age class objectives only apply to those lands classified as suitable for timber production that will be managed under even-aged treatments in the five management areas that include regularly scheduled timber harvest. The percentage of suitable land to be managed using uneven-aged treatment has been increased to a minimum of 20 percent in response to public comments that the timber program on the GMNF should have a greater focus on uneven-aged management, and the re-examination of the type of treatments needed to reach desired vegetation objectives. Another reason for the higher objective for uneven-aged management is that some lands in Diverse Backcountry management area and Remote Wildlife Habitat management area, management areas using predominantly even-aged treatment due to a desire for long rotations, will be using uneven-aged treatments in some areas based on field conditions.

## CHANGES TO STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

### Soil, Water, and Riparian Area Protection and Restoration

We received comments that the wetland guidelines did not provide sufficient protection

for wetlands, vernal pools and seeps. Concerns were also related to protecting habitat for amphibians and winter water areas for turkeys. The Soil, Water, and Riparian Standards and Guidelines (S&Gs) have been modified to provide greater clarity in the intended protection of wetlands including vernal pools and seeps. Seeps have been added to the definition of wetlands in the glossary. The guideline for wetlands now states that within 100 feet of a wetland activities should be limited to those that protect, maintain, and improve the condition of the riparian resource.

### Wildlife

The standards and guidelines for Indiana bat roosting areas have been clarified in coordination with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife. These changes, based on comments from USFWS and new information, will provide more targeted direction on maintaining Indiana bat habitat. These changes aid future project design and streamline Endangered Species Act consultation.

### Rare and Unique Biological Features

The level of detail and direction for rare plants provided in the Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive (TES) amendment to the 1987 Forest Plan is greater than that provided in the Proposed Revised Forest Plan. The Proposed Revised Plan approach was taken for two reasons: 1) to avoid repeating direction provided in Forest Service Manual (FSM) 2760, and 2) to move detailed operational directions to a FSM supplement. We received comments expressing concern about the level of protection for species of concern that were not listed as threatened, endangered or sensitive. Forest Service staff examined the standards and guidelines and found that some of the standards and guidelines in the 1987 Forest Plan were not yet in the FSM Supplement direction. Without these S&Gs, we would have had to produce analyses on how each site-specific project could affect plants that are species of concern, and then develop mitigation to protect them. By changing the S&Gs to be

more detailed we will be able to refer to the protection afforded these plants in the S&Gs.

We received comments that the nesting season for peregrine falcons begins earlier than reflected in the Proposed Revised Forest Plan standards and guidelines. The standard to protect Peregrine Falcon nesting sites has been changed to begin on March 1 rather than March 15 in consultation with the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department and a peregrine falcon expert. The guideline providing a nest site buffer zone has been extended to a minimum of 660 feet and that minimum distance may be extended on a case-by-case basis if needed to protect nesting birds.

Forest Service Staff raised the concern that the standards for Great Blue Heron, Northern Goshawk, and Osprey would require surveys for these species before any activity. Identifying "active" nests can be very problematic for goshawks, in particular, as they may have multiple nests that they are working on in any given year, and they can nest almost anywhere on the Forest. Forest Service staff reviewed potential situations in the field while considering the most effective procedures to protect nests when and where necessary. Based on this review the standards and guidelines for these species have been consolidated under one heading with three guidelines which pertain to all three species. This provides greater flexibility for Forest Service staff in project planning while protecting any nest found during management activities.

## **Recreation and Trails**

In response to public and Forest Service staff concerns about continued recreation facilities and trail use in management areas where these activities were not consistent with the desired Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class, the Forest-wide standard requiring that management areas be managed consistent with the ROS class has been removed. The ROS class is a Desired Condition and cannot always be attained but provides a direction toward which to manage. It is not always the best choice for all resources considered for the Forest Service to close trails and recreation

facilities and relocate these sites. It is also not inconsistent with management area allocations to have some facilities that do not meet all of the desired conditions. The standard requiring management to be consistent with MA direction has been retained thus requiring management actions to be consistent with the DFC of a particular MA.

We received public comment on standards and guidelines for mountain bike use. These comments expressed a concern that biking was allowed only on roads and trails designated for that use ("closed unless designated open"). Forest Service roads that are posted open are not usually posted for particular uses, and most public roads are open to bicycles and horses. Past management for trails was based on 1987 Forest Plan management direction, patterns of use, resource concerns, management of potential user conflicts, and health and safety concerns. The standards and guidelines for bicycle and equestrian use have been changed to reflect management reality. Forest Service roads (classes 1 through 5) are open to bicycles, and saddle, pack, and draft animals unless posted closed. Bicycles, and saddle, pack, and draft animals will be allowed only on trails that are designated for that use. Trail use on the GMNF must be managed and the routes for various recreational trail uses need to be confined to trails designed and maintained for specific uses. The term mountain bike has been changed to the more generic term bicycle throughout the document to recognize the variety in types of bicycles used on the Forest

We received many comments on the use of summer ORVs on the GMNF. These comments expressed concerns about potential resource damage and introducing summer ORV use could change the character and overall quality of recreational experiences. The Revised Forest Plan is far more restrictive than the 1987 Forest Plan in terms of the potential locations of summer ORV trails. The Proposed Revised Forest Plan limits summer ORV use to connecting corridors that link sections of a larger state-wide motorized trail system. I have decided to continue with this direction for summer ORV use on the GMNF in the 2006 Forest Plan. The standards and guidelines for

motorized use have been clarified and further restricted, and new standards and guidelines have been added to clarify the limited role the GMNF will play in providing summer ORV use. These changes include adding a standard prohibiting summer ORV trail heads and prohibiting the creation of an entirely or predominantly self contained summer ORV trail system on the GMNF.

## **CHANGES TO MANAGEMENT AREA DIRECTION**

### **Remote Wildlife Habitat**

We received comments expressing concern that the Remote Wildlife Habitat (RWH) management area would prohibit desirable trail relocations or construction of missing trail segments of an existing trail system. We also received comments expressing concern that the creation of early successional habitat and permanent openings may be difficult due to the management direction for the Remote Wildlife Habitat management area. A number of changes were made to the RWH management area including changes in the major emphasis, desired condition, and standards and guidelines. These changes are intended to clarify that although recreation uses are to be de-emphasized in this management area, existing uses, particularly trail maintenance, relocations and completions may occur. The management area's focus on reclusive species has also been changed to focus more on the remote habitat provided for all species. The intent of the desired condition for the management area is to enhance permanent upland openings through timber and vegetation management and to maintain these openings as needed has been clarified.

## **CHANGES TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

### **Soil Analysis**

We received comments about the adequacy of our acid deposition, soil productivity, and land suitability analysis relative to timber harvest.

Additional information provided by commenters was reviewed and discussed with subject matter experts to determine if any adjustments in the timber management approach were necessary. We have added analysis to the soils section of the Final EIS on nutrient loss with respect to biomass removal and acid deposition. I have considered this additional information, along with the 2006 Forest Plan's standards and guidelines and monitoring approach, and do not see a need to change our initial determination of which lands are classified as suitable for timber production.

## **CHANGES TO APPENDICES**

### **Roadless Inventory**

The Forest Service staff invested additional resources to further review some of the specific areas of concern expressed in comments on the roadless inventory. This review resulted in approximately 6,730 acres being added to the roadless inventory in three different roadless areas.

We received comments on the condition of Forest Service system roads in the Bolles Brook area of Woodford and Glastenbury. Forest Service staff conducted field reconnaissance and found the roads did not fit the improved road definition. Due to this information, the Bolles Brook area was added to the Glastenbury Roadless Area. The acreage of this roadless area has changed from 42,511 acres to 43,645 acres, an increase of 1,134 acres.

The Austin Brook road corridor FR 25 was specifically excluded from the Breadloaf Wilderness designation in 1984 and for this reason was not included in our initial roadless inventory. Based on public comment regarding the linear nature of the road leading into a remote area, the area was added to the roadless inventory and was evaluated as a possible addition to the Breadloaf Wilderness.

We received comments requesting the Forest Service to consider the Abbey Pond area's appropriateness to be considered as a Wilderness Study Area and that it be included

in the roadless area inventory. Further analysis of the initial roadless inventory showed that the area was greater than 5,000 acres in size. Abbey Pond was added to the roadless inventory in response to new information regarding opportunities for solitude in the area. Further analysis indicated that the Abbey Pond area contained 1,800 acres of Semi-primitive Non-motorized (SPNM) ROS class, which the Forest Service judged to have sufficient solitude potential. In addition, the trail bisecting the area, originally believed to be an active snowmobile trail, was no longer being used as a snowmobile trail. Abbey Pond has been added to the roadless inventory and is a 5,453 acre stand-alone roadless area located on the north half of the Forest.

These changes have resulted in a total of 124,321 acres of inventoried roadless areas in 37 different areas of the Forest. I have considered the additions to the original inventory, and have evaluated them relative to our overall management area allocations and

proposals for Wilderness Study Areas. I believe the Selected Alternative strikes a good balance in assigning these inventoried lands to various management allocations for the next ten to fifteen years.

### **Proclamation Boundary Maps**

Changes to the Proclamation Boundary maps for Alternative E Modified were made to be consistent with changes in management area allocations. The area around National Forest System lands on Dorset Mountain was changed to the Remote Backcountry management area to provide the potential for a larger remote area should the Forest Service acquire the land. The lands on the east side of Somerset Reservoir, now owned by Trans Canada Corporation, were changed to the Remote Wildlife Habitat management area to provide for the potential of consistent management on most of the east side of the reservoir should the Forest Service acquire these lands.

Senior Community Service Employment Program Enrollees on Silver Bridge



## Public Involvement

Beginning in 1996, the staff of the GMNF implemented a thorough and active public involvement effort that would continue throughout the planning process. A variety of public involvement tools and methods were used including public meetings, open houses, field trips, newsletters, news releases, and meetings with special interest groups upon request. The efforts of the Forest Service and the public participants provided valuable contributions to the development of the 2006 Forest Plan.

### 1996 to 1998

The Forest Plan revision process was initiated in 1996, with the Forest Service Joint Core Planning Team (Forest Service staff representing the GMNF, the Finger Lakes National Forest, and the White Mountain National Forest) outlining basic principles and procedures for revising their Forest Plans. One primary tenet of the planning process was to focus on collaborative public involvement, with goals to:

- Involve the public from the beginning
- Share information and gather feedback from the public
- Focus public involvement on dialogue, learning, and joint problem-solving

A five phase process to revise the GMNF 1987 Forest Plan was developed and is outlined below.

1) Public outreach: The Forest Service developed a list of issues based on the 1987 Forest Plan and through discussions and public meetings with Forest Service employees, the public, and groups engaged in forest management.

2) Public Planning Groups: The Forest Service hosted public planning group meetings to disseminate information on planning regulations, past management plans, and other relevant information. The public planning groups reviewed performance of the 1987 Forest Plan and raised further issues.

3) Collect information to evaluate revision needs: The Forest Service and public planning groups formed technical working groups to collect and analyze information on specific issues raised by the public planning groups.

4) Need for change: The technical working groups worked with the public planning groups to document areas of possible change to the existing Forest Plan.

5) Formal NEPA process to revise the Forest Plan: The Forest Service followed the formal National Environmental Policy Act process to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the revision of the Forest Plan. The public remained involved in the process by providing comments to proposals, ideas for management, solutions to problems, and concerns to be addressed.

### Public Outreach Sessions

- Boston, Massachusetts
- Bennington, Vermont
- Bristol, Vermont
- Rutland, Vermont

### Public Planning Group Meetings

- Rutland, Vermont 7/31/1997
- Middlebury, Vermont 9/16/1997
- Peru, Vermont 10/20/1997
- Rutland, Vermont 12/3/1997
- Rutland, Vermont 6/11/1998

Twenty-two management issues were identified and discussed at these meetings.

In 1999, Congress halted all Plan revisions in preparation for a revised national planning rule. At that point, all activities related to the public planning groups on the GMNF stopped.

## 2001 to 2002: Pre-Notice of Intent

The GMNF resumed Forest Plan revision in 2001. At this time, the Forest Service received a grant from the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution (U.S. Institute) to develop and implement a public involvement process for Plan revision. The U.S. Institute contracted Adamant Accord, Inc. to work directly with the Forest Service and the public. The goal was to help the public and Forest Service collaboratively resolve contentious issues and develop Forest Plan alternatives to address these issues. Through this grant, Adamant Accord, Inc. was charged with:

- 1) Preparing a Situation Assessment
- 2) Designing and evaluating a public involvement process to revise the Forest Plan
- 3) Facilitating meetings
- 4) Training the Forest Service and stakeholders in environmental conflict resolution techniques in order to collaboratively revise the Forest Plan and to resolve contentious future issues
- 5) Consulting on the design of public planning meetings
- 6) Focusing the issues for use in the Notice of Intent to Revise the Forest Plan using information from the Conflict Assessment
- 7) Creating a collaborative atmosphere with the public in order to explore issues and start to develop alternatives to the Forest Plan

### Situation Assessment

Adamant Accord, Inc. worked with the GMNF staff to identify a comprehensive list of stakeholders who were interested in or affected by the management of the GMNF. Close to 80 stakeholders representing a broad range of perspectives, were interviewed for the Situation Assessment.

Based on Adamant Accord's analysis of the interview results, a number of challenges were identified that the Forest Service would have to navigate to have a successful public involvement process. While the challenges that

the public involvement process presented were significant, the assessment outlined recommendations to meet those challenges. Six challenges and associated recommendations included:

- 1) Increase public understanding of the Forest Plan revision process
- 2) Create increased opportunities for dialogue
- 3) Provide a range of participation opportunities
- 4) Develop a collaborative process for building agreement
- 5) Clarify the role of the Forest Service in the Forest Plan revision process
- 6) Clarify how the Forest Service will address the wilderness proposal and timber program issues in the Forest Plan revision process

### Public Planning Meetings

A series of public planning meetings were held at the following locations:

- Londonderry, Vermont 9/26/01
- Middlebury, Vermont 10/4/01
- Rutland, Vermont 10/9/01
- Bennington, Vermont 10/11/01
- Granville, Vermont 10/17/01

These meetings were designed to:

- Provide an opportunity for community discussion on the planning process
- Provide an overview of the results of the plan revision process that began in 1996 and what has happened since then
- Outline current Forest Service planning requirements and other laws that affect Plan revision
- Validate issues identified in 1996 and identify any issues that have emerged since then
- Discuss the GMNF proposed public planning process and timeline

Public input from these meetings was used to determine necessary changes, actions that should be taken, and issues to be addressed in the Forest Plan revision process. From public input and internal evaluations, the proposed action was developed and the NEPA process



was begun by publishing a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register.

## **2002 to 2004: Post Notice of Intent to the Notice of Availability of the Proposed Revised Forest Plan and Draft EIS**

The NOI was published in the Federal Register May 2, 2002. After the NOI was published, three additional public meetings were held in May 2002 to review the NOI and allow the public a chance to meet the Forest planning staff and other resource specialists, become more familiar with the planning process, and provide input on plan revision. These meetings were in the evenings on the following dates and locations:

- Middlebury, Vermont 5/20/02
- Wilmington, Vermont 5/23/02
- Rutland, Vermont 5/28/02

### **Local Planning Group Meetings**

From January 2001 through June 2004, the Forest Service held meetings with “Local Planning Groups” on a regular basis in five communities near the Forest. A variety of meeting formats and styles were used, typically including a formal presentation followed by small group discussions, open house feedback sessions, collaborative hands-on mapping sessions, or question-answer periods. In addition to these meetings, the Forest Service made presentations to various towns, regional planning commissions, and other interested groups, and held additional meetings in communities where there was a desire to discuss particular topics. Below is a list of the LPG meetings that were held in 2003 and 2004.

The **January and February 2003** LPG meetings focused on desired future conditions for the Forest.

- Arlington, Vermont 1/21/03
- Bristol, Vermont 1/23/03/03
- Rutland, Vermont 1/30/03
- Granville, Vermont 2/11/03
- Londonderry, Vermont 2/12/03

The **March 2003** LPG meetings focused on draft goals for the revised Forest Plan.

- Arlington, Vermont 3/11/03
- Londonderry, Vermont 3/12/03
- Bristol, Vermont 3/18/03
- Hancock, Vermont 3/20/03
- Rutland, Vermont 3/25/03

The **April 2003** LPG meetings focused on land acquisition, land adjustment, developed recreation and undeveloped recreation.

- Arlington, Vermont 4/08/03
- Londonderry, Vermont 4/09/03
- Bristol, Vermont 4/15/03
- Hancock, Vermont 4/17/03
- Rutland, Vermont 4/22/03

The **May 2003** LPG meetings focused on getting public input on the management of land acquired since the 1987 Forest Plan was written.

- Arlington, Vermont 5/13/03
- Londonderry, Vermont 5/14/03
- Hancock, Vermont 5/15/03
- Bristol, Vermont 5/20/03
- Rutland, Vermont 5/27/03
- Warren, Vermont 6/3/03

The **June 2003** LPG meetings focused on roads and the Forest Service requirement to carry out an assessment called the Roads Analysis Process – Phase II.

- Arlington, Vermont 6/10/03
- Londonderry, Vermont 6/11/03
- Bristol, Vermont 6/17/03
- Hancock, Vermont 6/19/03
- Rutland, Vermont 6/24/03
- Wilmington, Vermont 6/26/03

The **July 2003** LPG meetings focused on trails.

- Arlington, Vermont 7/8/03
- Londonderry, Vermont 7/9/03
- Bristol, Vermont 7/15/03
- Hancock, Vermont 7/17/03
- Rutland, Vermont 7/22/03

The **August 2003** LPG meetings focused on ecosystem management and the conservation of biodiversity.

- Arlington, Vermont 8/12/03
- Londonderry, Vermont 8/13/03
- Bristol, Vermont 8/19/03
- Hancock, Vermont 8/21/03
- Rutland, Vermont 8/26/03

The **September 2003** LPG meetings focused on Wilderness.

- Arlington, Vermont 9/9/03
- Londonderry, Vermont 9/10/03
- Bristol, Vermont 9/16/03
- Hancock, Vermont 9/18/03
- Rutland, Vermont 9/23/03

The **October 2003** meetings focused on vegetation and timber management.

- Londonderry, Vermont 10/8/03
- Arlington, Vermont 10/14/03
- Hancock, Vermont 10/16/03
- Bristol, Vermont 10/21/03
- Rutland, Vermont 10/28/03

The **January 2004** LPG meetings were the first in a series of meetings devoted to management areas (MAs) and the development of draft alternatives for the revised Forest Plan.

- Arlington, Vermont 1/13/04
- Londonderry, Vermont 1/14/04
- Hancock, Vermont 1/15/04
- Bristol, Vermont 1/20/04
- Rutland, Vermont 1/27/04

The **February 2004** LPGs used the MAs presented in January 2004 to map the GMNF.

- Arlington, Vermont 2/10/04
- Londonderry, Vermont 2/11/04
- Bristol, Vermont 2/17/04
- Hancock, Vermont 2/19/04
- Rutland, Vermont 2/24/04

The **March 2004** LPG meetings were designed to get people to come to “considerable agreement” on MA mapping for the GMNF.

- Middlebury, Vermont 3/17/04
- Londonderry, Vermont 3/24/04

The **June 2004** LPG meetings focused on the preliminary draft alternatives.

- Bennington, Vermont 6/8/04
- Londonderry, Vermont 6/9/04
- Bristol, Vermont 6/15/04
- Rochester, Vermont 6/17/04
- Rutland, Vermont 6/22/04

## **2005 to 2006: Post Notice of Availability of the Proposed Revised Forest Plan and Draft EIS**

### **Open Houses**

In **April, 2005**, after the release of the Draft Revised Forest Plan and Draft EIS, a series of four open houses were held to present the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, and answer questions about the analysis and the preferred alternative. These meetings were held in the evenings at the following locations:

- Middlebury, Vermont 4/18/2005
- Dover, Vermont 4/20/2005
- Rutland, Vermont 4/26/2005
- Montpelier, Vermont 4/27/2005

These open houses were important for providing the information to the public and providing an opportunity for the public to ask questions about the Proposed Revised Plan so that they could provide informed comments.

### **Special Meetings with Groups**

After the release of the Proposed Revised Forest Plan and Draft EIS, the Forest Service met with federal, state, regional and local agencies and governments, and with various regional and state-wide interest groups. The purpose of these meetings was to present the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, and answer questions about the analysis and the preferred alternative. Meetings with interest groups were arranged and held at the request of the group.

- State of Vermont, Agency of Natural Resources 3/21/2005
- US Fish and Wildlife Service/Environmental Protection Agency 3/24/2005
- Vermont Traditions Coalition 3/31/2005
- Vermont Audubon Chapter Assembly 4/9/2005
- Vermont Forest Products Association Board of Directors 4/21/2005
- Bennington County Regional Planning Commission 4/21/2005
- Vermont Association of Snow Travelers 4/25/2005
- Blueberry Hill Group 4/26/2005
- University of Vermont Rubenstein School for the Environment 4/28/2005
- Town of Lincoln 5/16/2005
- Windham Regional Planning Commission, Natural Resources Committee 5/18/2005
- Two Rivers-Outtaouquechee Regional Planning Commission 5/25/2005
- Green Mountain Club 5/31/2005
- Addison County Regional Planning Commission 6/8/2005
- Rutland Regional Planning Commission 6/21/2005
- Town of Lincoln 6/21/2005
- Antioch New England Graduate School 9/14/2005
- Environmental Protection Agency 12/22/2005

## Other Public Involvement

In addition to holding over 80 public meetings, the GMNF involved the public through public notices, newsletters, mailings, and web site updates, and encouraged them to provide comments in many different ways. People provided input on the Plan revision process through phone calls, email, written letters, or personal contacts at Forest Service offices.

### **Website**

The GMNF maintained other avenues for public involvement besides public meetings. This was done in an effort to involve as many people as possible in the revision of the Forest Plan. One key aspect of the public involvement included a

Plan revision web site ([http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/gmfl/nepa\\_planning/plan\\_revision.htm](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/gmfl/nepa_planning/plan_revision.htm)). The web site contained such information as:

- 1) Frequently Asked Questions about Forest Plan revision
- 2) Biographical information on the Planning Team
- 3) The GMNF 1987 Forest Plan
- 4) Links to other useful information
- 5) Plan revision documents and assessments
- 6) Information presented at each public meeting, including handouts and PowerPoint slide presentations
- 7) Public comments recorded at each public meeting

### **Mailing Lists**

The GMNF sent out meeting notices and updates on the Plan revision process to a mailing list of over 1,300 people. The mailing list included interested individuals, State, federal, regional, and local governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and Native American Tribes.

### **Educational Forums**

Educational Forums were held on timber harvesting, recreation, wilderness, and the history of the GMNF from November 2001 to May of 2002. The forums were designed to provide information from different perspectives on Plan revision topics with high public interest. A number of panelists were asked to provide short presentations on the topic including Forest Service staff, which provided background information. After the presentations, there was an opportunity for people to ask the panelists questions and to make comments on the topic.

### **Schedule of Proposed Actions**

Forest Plan Revision has been listed on the GMNF Schedule of Proposed Actions since 2001. The schedule is distributed quarterly to over 240 addresses and posted on the Forest's web site.

### **Newsletters**

During the Plan revision process, particularly when public meetings were not being held, newsletters were generated to provide updates

and information to the public. The newsletters were sent to over 1,300 people and were available at all GMNF offices. The newsletters included:

- 1) Information on the final Soils Assessment and steps for staying involved with public participation (11/03);
- 2) Plan Alternative update, including how public involvement shaped alternative development (9/04)
- 3) Release information for the Draft EIS and Proposed Revised Draft Plan, including how to participate in the formal comment period (12/04)
- 4) Draft EIS and Proposed Revised Draft Plan Content Analysis summary of comments (9/05)

### **News Releases**

In addition to newsletters, news releases were prepared in an effort to reach additional audiences, such as those not on the GMNF mailing list. News releases included:

- 1) Public meeting kick-off (9/01)
- 2) Announcement of grant receipt and partnership with U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution and Adamant Accord, Inc. (6/02)
- 3) Notice for public involvement and situation assessment interviews (7/02)
- 4) Information regarding the proposed new planning rule (12/02)
- 5) Public involvement questionnaire (8/03)
- 6) Notice of Draft EIS and Proposed Revised Draft Plan release (3/05)
- 7) Response to op/ed articles commenting on the Forest Plan revision process (5/05)

### **Coordination with Indian Tribes and Other Government Agencies**

The Forest Service invited tribal, federal, State, and local level government agencies to provide input on the Proposed Revised Draft Plan

and/or Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS).

### **Tribal Involvement**

The Forest Service contacted Ms. Sherry White, Mohican Cultural Preservation Officer of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of the Mohican Nation, and delivered an information packet specific to Heritage Resources and Tribal Relations to her during her visit to the GMNF on 10/13/2004. A discussion was held at the Forest Service office on the same day between Ms. White, Dave Lacy, Forest Archaeologist, and Steve Kimball, North Half District Ranger. The Forest Service delivered an information packet specific to Heritage Resources and Tribal Relations to Ms. Debra Bergeron, Abenaki Repatriation Coordinator and Liaison with GMNF of the Missisquoi Band of the Abenaki Nation on 08/05/2004. A discussion was held between Ms. Bergeron and Dave Lacy, Forest Archaeologist, on the same day in the Tribal Office.

### **Other Government Agencies**

In July and August of 2004, the Forest Service held two meetings to receive input on the GMNF Proposed Revised Draft Plan from State, federal, and regional agencies. The following federal, State, and local level government agencies were consulted in the preparation of the GMNF Proposed Revised Draft Plan, Draft EIS, and/or documents used in the environmental analysis process:

#### **Federal**

- USDA Forest Service, Northeast Research Station
- USDA Forest Service, State & Private Forestry
- USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service
- Environmental Protection Agency
- US Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- Department of Interior National Park Service
- Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management Eastern States Office

- Department of Interior US Geological Survey
- Federal Highway Administration

**State**

- Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, State Historic Preservation Office
- Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife
- Vermont Non-game and Natural Heritage Program
- Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development
- Vermont Agency of Natural Resources
- Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets
- Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation
- Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation
- Vermont Agency of Transportation

**Regional and Local**

- Addison County Regional Planning Commission
- Bennington County Regional Planning Commission
- Rutland Regional Planning Commission
- Two Rivers – Ottauquechee Regional Planning Commission
- Otter Creek Natural Resource Conservation District
- Starksboro Conservation Commission
- Weybridge Conservation Commission
- Ferrisburgh Conservation Commission
- Ripton Conservation Commission

**Tribal**

- Abenaki Nation
- Mohican Nation

Cairn on Glastenbury Mountain



## Alternatives

### Alternative Development

Five major issues identified through the Forest Plan revision public involvement process that were used as the primary basis for developing a range of alternatives include: 1) Special Designations; 2) Biodiversity and Ecosystem Management; 3) Social and Economic Concerns; 4) Recreation Management; and 5) Timber Management. Public participation through local planning group meetings further refined the issues used for alternative development.

The interdisciplinary team developed five preliminary alternatives in response to the issues and need for change. The preliminary alternatives were presented at a series of public meetings in June 2004. Many of the comments received during and after the meetings were incorporated into alternative design, and led to the final five alternatives that are included for detailed analysis in the Final EIS. While all five alternatives provide a range of multiple uses, goods, and services, each addresses the issues in a different way. The process used to formulate the alternatives is described in Chapter 2 of the Final EIS.

The task of the interdisciplinary team working on the 2006 Forest Plan was to develop a reasonable range of alternatives. Based upon resource information, public comment, and experience gained while implementing the 1987 Forest Plan, the team crafted what I believe to be implementable options for meeting the purpose and need for this plan revision. To the extent practicable, we have solicited and reviewed alternatives submitted by the public and documented that analysis in the planning record. Existing resource conditions and addressing the major issues are the heart of the development of the alternatives. Development of a programmatic multiple-use resource management plan involves compromise and balancing of a myriad of biological, physical, and social factors. The range of alternatives reflects various options for addressing the purpose and need, addressing significant issues, and displaying the trade-offs associated

with each approach to future management of the Forest.

### Alternatives Not Considered in Detail

The interdisciplinary team considered five alternatives in response to public concerns and issues, but eliminated them from detailed study in the Final EIS. Although they contributed to the range of alternatives considered, the five alternatives were eliminated from detailed study because they were either impractical, infeasible, or did not meet the purpose and need for Forest Plan revision. A description of these alternatives and the reasons for not studying them in detail can be found in Chapter 2 of the Final EIS and is summarized below:

#### ***No Timber Harvest***

This alternative addresses the public issue regarding the amount of timber harvesting that should be allowed, but more specifically, whether timber harvesting should occur at all on the GMNF. This alternative was eliminated from detailed analysis because it would not adequately address the issues and meet the criteria set for revising the Forest Plan. Timber harvesting is a necessary management tool for creating and maintaining desired wildlife habitat, and for maintaining and enhancing natural communities and other resources. Without timber harvesting scheduled to achieve these key objectives, this alternative would not meet the purpose and need of revising the Forest Plan.

#### ***Greatly Increased Timber Harvesting***

This alternative addresses the public issue regarding the amount of timber harvesting that should occur on the GMNF, but more specifically whether timber harvesting should be increased. Public comments suggested that timber harvesting could be maximized by placing all lands except existing Wilderness and special areas into management areas that allow timber harvesting. This alternative was eliminated from detailed analysis because it emphasized timber production to such an extent that the management and protection of other resources would not adequately address the issues and meet the criteria set for revising the Forest Plan. For this reason, this

alternative fails to meet the purpose and need of revising the Forest Plan.

***All Inventoried Roadless Areas  
Recommended for Wilderness Study***

This alternative addresses the public issue of desired wilderness amounts on the GMNF. In 2004, the Forest Service completed a roadless inventory and evaluation as part of the Forest Plan revision process. The inventory identified 36 roadless areas on the GMNF totaling 117,591 acres. The inventory was updated in 2005 to include a total of 37 roadless areas consisting of 124,321 acres. This alternative seeks a Forest Service recommendation that all of the Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) be recommended for Wilderness study. Since all IRAs did not meet the minimum criteria to consider for inclusion in a Wilderness Study Area MA, the suggestion to recommend all 37 IRAs for Wilderness designation was eliminated from detailed study. This alternative was also eliminated from detailed analysis because it would not adequately address the issues and meet the criteria set for revising the Forest Plan.

***Vermont Wilderness Association Proposal***

In November 2001, the Forest Service was presented with a proposal from the Vermont Wilderness Association, a coalition comprised of 15 State, regional, and national conservation groups. This alternative proposed an additional 79,200 acres (approximately 20% of the GMNF) as Wilderness, 45,000 acres (approximately 11% of the GMNF) as National Recreation Area, and 15,000 acres (approximately 4% of the GMNF) as National Conservation Area. This would increase congressionally designated areas to 55 percent of GMNF acreage. This alternative emphasizes restrictive management designations to an extent that would be unreasonable, as management and protection of other resources would fall below acceptable levels. This alternative was also eliminated from detailed analysis because it would not adequately address the issues and meet the criteria set for revising the Forest Plan.

This alternative was also eliminated from detailed study for several other reasons. Some of the areas desired for Wilderness designation

in this alternative would not meet national and regional criteria for an Inventoried Roadless Area because they included roads and snowmobile trails. In addition, some of the areas proposed to be National Recreation Areas (NRA) could not be effectively managed under this designation since they include large areas that are not on NFS lands. Finally, the proposal to designate the Moosalamoo area as a NRA was considered, but it was determined that the area's unique values would be better served by a recreation and education MA.

***Initial Alternative A***

At the preliminary stage of developing alternatives, Alternative A ("no-action" alternative or current management) included the allocation of over 90,000 acres of newly acquired lands (MA 9.2) obtained before and after 1987 to other MAs, thus allowing more proactive management activities to meet desired conditions. The allocation of these lands to other management areas followed criteria that best matched management direction in the 1987 Forest Plan, and did not include any of the new management areas that have been developed and used for other alternatives such as Remote Wildlife Habitat, recommended Wilderness Study Areas, and Green Mountain Escarpment. There were public concerns that this approach did not adequately represent a true "no-action" alternative as a basis for comparing the other alternatives considered. The initial Alternative A as described during public meetings in June 2004 was replaced with a different approach as a result of this concern and thus was dismissed from further consideration.

**Alternatives Considered in Detail**

A detailed description of the alternatives analyzed in detail can be found in Chapter 2 of the Final EIS.

***Alternative A***

***Theme***

Alternative A is the "no-action" alternative and serves as the baseline for comparison of the other alternatives. "No-action" is considered "no change" from current management direction provided in the 1987 Forest Plan as amended.

It reflects the current level of goods and services provided by the Forest and the most likely amount of goods and services expected to be provided in the future if current management direction continues. Most of the changes identified for the other alternatives specific to the goals, objectives, standards, guidelines, and management area direction have been incorporated into Alternative A in order to reflect necessary improvements to the 2006 Forest Plan identified through monitoring since 1987. Alternative A is consistent with the level of management intensity envisioned under the 1987 Forest Plan.

Alternative A would not recommend any additional areas for wilderness study nor would it add any new special area management designations such as the Green Mountain Escarpment, Alpine/subalpine, or Moosalamoo Recreation and Education Area. It would retain the Significant Streams management area with 11 rivers identified as eligible for the national system of Wild and Scenic Rivers and 38 Significant Streams. Although a study completed during Forest Plan revision determined 20 rivers to be eligible for inclusions in the national system of Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers, only the 11 rivers already included in the Significant Streams MA would be managed as such in Alternative A. Unlike the other alternatives, Alternative A would retain the Newly Acquired Lands management area (currently consisting of over 90,000 acres) with an emphasis to protect the natural resources and management options until studies are done to determine the desired future condition of these lands. The majority of the Forest (72 percent) would be allocated to management areas with recreation opportunities in the motorized ROS classes. The Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) would be an average of 13.8 million board feet (MMBF) per year with an emphasis on greater flexibility of harvest treatments within the Diverse Forest Use and Diverse Backcountry MAs.

#### *Decision Rationale*

I did not select Alternative A because it does not address the need for change for Forest Plan revision as well as the Selected Alternative. Alternative A does not recommend any

additional areas for wilderness study and fails to acknowledge there are areas on the Forest exhibiting high-quality wilderness characteristics worthy of preservation as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. This alternative also fails to assign 20 rivers and streams eligible for designation as a part of the nationwide system of Wild and Scenic Rivers and establish direction for their protections. It provides for the lowest level of opportunities for the maintenance of oak forest communities among the alternatives thus limiting the management options for maintaining rare species habitat and restoring natural disturbance regimes on the Forest. Alternative A would not set specific management goals and desired conditions for over 90,000 acres of lands acquired since the mid 1980's, nor would it address concerns for timely management area designation of land acquisitions that may occur in the future. It also would not provide a diverse range of recreation opportunities that complement those off of NFS lands since nearly three quarters of the Forest would be managed for motorized use.

#### **Alternative B**

##### *Theme*

Alternative B was developed with an emphasis on increasing timber and wildlife management opportunities, increasing early successional age composition of forest community types, and producing high-quality sawtimber. It also was developed to provide for biodiversity through an emphasis on active vegetative management through more flexible timber management opportunities on large areas of the Forest. It accommodates a wide range of Forest uses including opportunities for motorized recreation and recreation that requires road access.

Alternative B would provide for small amounts of new recommendations for wilderness study (1 percent of the Forest) adjacent to existing Wilderness areas on the North Half of the Forest to create more identifiable boundaries and improve the management efficiency. There would be 28 percent of the Forest within management areas where natural processes dominate while 68 percent would be allocated to management areas where active vegetation management may occur. This alternative also



includes 18 percent of the Forest that would be managed for longer rotations and more mature forest conditions in the Remote Wildlife Habitat (3 percent) and Diverse Backcountry (15 percent) management areas. There would be 71 percent of the Forest available for motorized recreation opportunities. Areas that provide less accessible, remote, non-motorized opportunities would be less in Alternative B than in the other alternatives. The ASQ would be an average of 17.5 MMBF per year and would provide the greatest opportunities and flexibility for timber management with 49 percent of the Forest allocated to the Diverse Forest Use management area.

#### *Decision Rationale*

I did not select Alternative B because overall it would not provide for the desired balance of Forest uses and products in comparison with the Selected Alternative. It would not provide for any substantial increases in wilderness designation with the least amount of recommended Wilderness Study Areas of any of the action alternatives. It also does not allocate as much of the Forest to other Special Areas such as the Green Mountain Escarpment nor does it make any allocation to the Moosalamoo Recreation and Education Area. Alternative B would provide for the least opportunity of the action alternatives for maintenance of the oak community type on the Forest and the second least opportunity to provide remote habitat for reclusive wildlife species. It would also not afford any special management emphasis to the recreation, cultural, and historical character of the Moosalamoo area provided by the Selected Alternative. This alternative would not provide a diverse range of recreation opportunities because it does not provide a balanced mix of recreation settings. It provides less land in the non-motorized ROS classes and thus does not address the need for more remote and secluded recreation settings. Although Alternative B provides for the most flexibility in vegetation management, it does so with too much expense to the amount of Forest allocated to management areas where natural processes dominate or that would be managed for longer rotations and more mature forest conditions. The Mountain Slope Landtype

Association in the Taconics would not be represented at the desired 5 percent level to meet the ecological reference network objective, and thus would provide limited opportunities for long-term research of this forested ecosystem.

#### **Alternative C**

##### *Theme*

Alternative C was developed with an emphasis on providing a wider range of recreational experiences with a focus on remote recreational and improved tourism opportunities. It also would provide for the conservation of biodiversity through more areas of mature forest and longer rotation periods for timber harvesting.

Alternative C recommends Wilderness Study Areas that would add to existing Wilderness areas on the North and South halves of the Forest and recommends two new Wilderness Study Areas be established, one in Glastenbury on the west side of the Appalachian Trail corridor and the other along the high peaks of Worth Mountain, Monastery Mountain, and Philadelphia Peak (7 percent of the Forest). Alternative C includes the Moosalamoo Recreation and Education Area MA that would address the interest in recreational diversity, environmental and heritage education, and tourism in the Moosalamoo area. There would be 35 percent of the Forest within management areas where natural processes dominate while 60 percent would be allocated to management areas where active vegetation management may occur. This alternative also allocates 24 percent of the Forest to the Diverse Backcountry management area that would be managed for longer rotations and more mature forest conditions. Only 1 percent of the Forest would be allocated to the Remote Wildlife Habitat management area. Alternative C would provide for motorized recreational opportunities with 65 percent of the Forest designated to the motorized ROS classes. The ASQ would be an average of 16.8 MMBF per year and there would be more emphasis on longer rotations. There would be 30 percent of the Forest allocated to the Diverse Forest Use management area.

**Decision Rationale**

I did not select Alternative C because it would not provide for the desired balance of Forest uses and products in comparison with the Selected Alternative. Alternative C would not recommend the Glastenbury Wilderness Study Area configuration that would provide the highest quality wilderness characteristics. The size of the proposed Glastenbury Wilderness Study Area in Alternative C is over 9,000 acres smaller than in Alternative E Modified and does not have the rectangular shape of the recommendation in Alternative E Modified. It does recommend wilderness study for the Worth Mountain area on the North Half of the Forest. I feel the Worth Mountain area would be better allocated to the Remote Backcountry Forest management area provided by the Selected Alternative so that it can allow additional limited management opportunities for restoration, habitat improvement, and vista maintenance desired in this area. Although Alternative C provides for a fairly balanced mix of Forest allocations to management areas where natural processes dominate and those where more intensive management opportunities exist, it would allocate the least amount among the action alternatives to the Remote Wildlife Habitat management area. Thus, besides Alternative A, this alternative would have the lowest opportunity to manage and enhance the diversity of wildlife habitat in remote areas. As with Alternative B, the Mountain Slope Landtype Association in the Taconics would not be represented at the desired five percent level to meet the ecological reference network objective, and thus would provide limited opportunities for long-term research of this forested ecosystem. Alternative C would also have much of the Forest allocated to the motorized ROS classes and would not provide the balance desired to achieve the Forest Plan recreation goal for providing a diverse range of recreational opportunities.

**Alternative D****Theme**

Alternative D was developed with an emphasis on providing for conservation of biodiversity through less allocations of land to management areas allowing more intensive management

activities. Increasing mature and old forest community types, maintaining representatives of most natural communities in areas with minimal active vegetative management, and restoring and protecting rare and uncommon ecosystems were guiding principles for the development of this alternative.

Alternative D recommends additions to existing Wilderness areas on the North and South halves of the Forest, and recommends two new Wilderness Study Areas in the Glastenbury and Worth Mountain areas (12 percent of the Forest). The recommended Glastenbury Wilderness Study Area is largest in Alternative D and includes much of the Glastenbury Inventoried Roadless Area south of the MacIntyre Trail. The proposed Worth Mountain Wilderness Study Area is also largest in Alternative D and includes most of the Worth Mountain Inventoried Roadless Area. There would be 40 percent of the Forest within management areas where natural processes dominate while 56 percent would be allocated to management areas where active vegetation management may occur. The alternative also provides for the representation of all ecological types above the desired five percent ecological reference network objective. The greatest proportion of existing oak stands (58 percent) would be allocated to the Green Mountain Escarpment management area among the alternatives and would provide the greatest capacity for restoration and maintenance of the Escarpment's natural communities. Alternative D would provide for large contiguous areas with habitat restoration activities. This alternative also includes 26 percent of the Forest that would be managed for longer rotations and more mature forest conditions in the Remote Wildlife Habitat (11 percent) and Diverse Backcountry (15 percent) management areas. Alternative D would provide the most non-motorized recreation opportunities among the alternatives with 48 percent of the Forest designated to non-motorized ROS classes. The increase in remote areas and recommended Wilderness Study Areas would also provide greater opportunities for solitude and challenge. The ASQ would be an average of 16.0 MMBF per year and timber management would be more focused on

ecosystem and habitat maintenance and restoration. There would be 26 percent of the Forest allocated to the Diverse Forest Use management area.

#### *Decision Rationale*

I did not select Alternative D because it would not provide for the desired balance of Forest uses and products in comparison with the Selected Alternative. It is my judgment that this alternative recommends Wilderness Study Area designation that has too much impact to other Forest uses. Of particular concern is the closure of the 12-mile long “Up and Down” snowmobile trail within the northern portion of the proposed Glastenbury Wilderness Study Area. This trail provides a desired unique recreational experience that would be difficult to replace if lost due to wilderness designation. I also believe that the recommended Wilderness Study area in the Worth Mountain area is better suited to the Remote Backcountry Forest management area because of its size and configuration. It is my judgment that wilderness designation of this area would not provide for optimal future management for high quality wilderness conditions on the GMNF. Alternative D would allocate the lowest proportion of the Forest to management areas that are suitable for timber production among the action alternatives. The alternative would also afford the least amount of active vegetation management flexibility and provide the least opportunities for wildlife habitat creation, particularly the creation and maintenance of permanent upland openings. Alternative D does not make any allocation to the Moosalamoo Recreation and Education Area management area which would provide an opportunity to increase focus on interpretation, education and recreation, as well as provide potential benefit to communities through tourism.

#### ***Alternative E Modified – Selected Alternative Theme***

Alternative E Modified was developed with an emphasis on providing for a range of uses evenly distributed across the Forest. It focused on balancing a mix of opportunities in recreation, timber management, wildlife management, and ecosystem management by

providing for most active types of management to occur in the most accessible areas of the Forest. Alternative E was modified between the Draft EIS and Final EIS in response to comments, and to improve accuracy of information. The changes to goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines are based on our evaluation of comments received mainly for purposes of clarification, and do not substantially change the overall direction disclosed in the Proposed Revised Forest Plan.

Alternative E Modified recommends additions to existing Wilderness areas on the North and South halves of the Forest, and one new Wilderness Study Area in the Glastenbury area (7 percent of the Forest). The proposed Glastenbury Wilderness Study Area would be smaller than in Alternative D but larger than in Alternative C. This alternative includes the Moosalamoo Recreation and Education Area (similar to Alternative C) to address the interest in recreational diversity, ecological and heritage education, and tourism in the Moosalamoo area. There would be 36 percent of the Forest within management areas where natural processes dominate while 60 percent would be allocated to management areas where active vegetation management may occur. The alternative also provides for the representation of all ecological types above the desired five percent ecological reference network objective, similar to Alternative D. The proportion of existing oak stands (51 percent) allocated to the Green Mountain Escarpment management area would be slightly less than in Alternative D. This alternative also includes 23 percent of the Forest that would be managed for longer rotations and more mature forest conditions in the Remote Wildlife Habitat (8 percent) and Diverse Backcountry (15 percent) management areas. The Selected Alternative would provide a relatively balanced range of recreational opportunities and settings with 58 percent, and 43 percent of the Forest designated to the motorized and non-motorized ROS classes, respectively. Alternative E Modified would have an ASQ of an average of 16.4 MMBF per year and would provide a range of timber management opportunities with a balanced mix of management area allocations to Diverse Forest Use (30 percent of the Forest), and

Diverse Backcountry, Remote Wildlife Habitat, Green Mountain Escarpment, and Moosalamoo Recreation and Education Area (30 percent of the Forest). Diverse Forest Use management areas would also be located in the most accessible areas providing for more efficient opportunities for timber harvesting. Other areas would be focused on wildlife habitat creation, maintenance of natural communities, and longer rotations.

#### *Decision Rationale*

My rationale for selecting Alternative E Modified as the 2006 Forest Plan is detailed on pages 10 through 24 of this Record of Decision.

#### **The Environmentally Preferred Alternative**

The Council of Environmental Quality regulations implementing NEPA require the specification of "...the alternative or alternatives which were considered to be environmentally preferable" (40 CFR 1505.2(b)). I have reviewed the National Environmental Policy Act to determine the criteria for identifying the environmentally preferable alternative. All six criteria in NEPA (section 101(b)) were considered.

Based on my review of the six criteria in NEPA (section 101(b)) and the analysis of effects disclosed in the Final EIS, I have determined that Alternative E Modified is the environmentally preferable alternative. This alternative will allow for the most appropriate mix of management direction to protect, preserve, and enhance the historic, cultural, and natural resources on the GMNF. It also best addresses the protection and stewardship aspects of the criteria, while at the same time addressing those criteria which speak toward providing a balance between population and resource uses and attaining the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation.



Appalachian Trail Bridge

## Findings Related to Other National Policies, Laws, and Authorities

The Forest Service manages the GMNF in conformance with many laws, regulations, executive orders, and policies. The list provided here does not include all governing statutes that apply to the Forest Plan revision, but it highlights the primary ones guiding the preparation of this plan revision. In all cases, the 2006 Forest Plan is consistent with national law, policy, and direction.

### National Environmental Policy Act

The Forest has compiled and considered an enormous amount of information relevant to the effects of each alternative analyzed in the Final EIS. I believe that the best available and relevant scientific information has been considered. The public has been involved throughout the plan revision process in a manner that is far beyond the minimum requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). I find that the environmental analysis and public involvement process comply with the requirements set forth by the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1508).

These requirements include:

- considering a broad range of reasonable alternatives
- disclosing cumulative effects
- using best scientific information
- consideration of long-term and short-term effects
- disclosure of unavoidable adverse effects

The decision here does not directly authorize any new activities or projects, but rather activities and projects will be subject to additional site-specific environmental analysis that will tier to the Final EIS and follow applicable environmental analysis, public involvement, and administrative appeal procedures. The 2006 Forest Plan has adopted all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm. These means include

providing ecological conditions needed to support biological diversity, and standards and guidelines to mitigate adverse environmental effects that may result from implementing various management practices. The 2006 Forest Plan includes monitoring requirements and an adaptive management approach to assure needed adjustments are made over time.

### National Forest Management Act

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and its implementing regulations specify a number of requirements for forest plan development. Congress has mandated that forest plan revision assure that the plans provide for multiple-use and sustained yield of products and services. Not every use can or should occur on every acre. Our goal is to blend multiple-use of the Forest in such a way that is sustainable and best meets the needs of the American people.

The GMNF developed an integrated land and resource management plan using a systematic interdisciplinary approach to integrate consideration of physical, biological, economic, and other sciences. The 2006 Forest Plan maximizes net public benefit and contains strong conservation measures to protect, maintain, and improve soil and water resources, wildlife habitat, and other forest resources within a multiple-use context. The 2006 Forest Plan complies with each of the NFMA and regulatory requirements, as explained elsewhere in this Record of Decision, accompanying Final EIS, and Appendices. Certain requirements are discussed in further detail below.

The 1982 NFMA regulations require fish and wildlife habitat to be managed to maintain viable populations of existing native and desired non-native vertebrate species in the planning area (36 CFR 219.19; (1982)). A key part of forest plan revision was the evaluation of 110 species for viability concerns. Neither NFMA nor its implementing regulations create a concrete, precise standard for diversity. The original Committee of Scientists noted in the development of the early planning regulations

for NFMA that “it is impossible to write specific regulations to provide for diversity” and thus “there remains a great deal of room for honest debate on the translation of policy into management programs” (44 Federal Register 26600-26608, 26608). Because absolute certainty cannot be obtained regarding plant and animal community diversity, the planning process involves projections or estimates of distribution and abundance of plants and animals based upon ecological conditions necessary to maintain viable populations.

Using an ecological or “coarse filter” approach, broad land categories of wildlife habitat were identified. A relatively small change in the abundance and quality of wildlife habitats is likely to occur in the next decade due to actions we take as we implement the 2006 Forest Plan. Some changes in the quality and quantity of wildlife habitat will occur through natural succession and disturbances. These changes are not anticipated to create any species viability concerns. The Forest also used a species, or “fine filter”, analysis to assure that standards and guidelines were in place to provide for the needs of threatened, endangered, or sensitive species. Forest plan direction was developed to conserve habitat and avoid or reduce adverse effects of the future management actions. The analysis presented in the Final EIS indicates that under all alternatives there is a high likelihood of continued representation of all species and important wildlife habitats on the Forest.

There were five Management Indicator Species (MIS) chosen that will respond to forest management activities and assist in predicting the effects of implementing the forest plan over time. These MIS are white-tailed deer, gray squirrel, American woodcock, ruffed grouse, and brook trout. There are several reasons why particular MIS are not carried forward from the 1987 Forest Plan to the 2006 Forest Plan. Some MIS are ineffective as indicators for habitat changes in their represented communities. This may be caused by poor or ambiguous correlation to habitat change, by the adaptability of many species to changing conditions, or by confounding links to other habitat conditions (Capen et al. 1991, Niemi et

al 1997, Toth, 2000). The choice of MIS was based upon experience implementing the 1987 Forest Plan and the best available scientific information.

Management Indicator Species are just one part of the overall monitoring effort. Species that are not designated as MIS may still be monitored. Recognizing the discretion provided by the 1982 NFMA regulations (36 CFR 219.19(a)(1)), the Forest carefully selected MIS that will meet the intent of the NFMA regulations, but not impose an unattainable or unnecessarily burdensome monitoring requirement on the Forest.

The NFMA implementing regulations also require that forest plans identify the proportion of harvest methods that are proposed for implementation. The 2006 Forest Plan includes a forecast of the harvest methods that are likely to be chosen as the plan is implemented. The 2006 Forest Plan does not mandate that any particular harvest method be applied to any specific project. The choice of when, where and how to harvest timber is deferred as a future site-specific decision.

Adaptive management is an important part of ensuring compliance with the NFMA. Adaptive management is a management philosophy that runs throughout the 2006 Forest Plan. Recognizing that perfect information and resource inventories are impossible in an imperfect world, we anticipate that new scientific information and changes in resource conditions will require “course corrections” during the 10-15 year life of this plan. The 2006 Forest Plan is dynamic and will respond to new information.

The 1982 Planning Rule requires identification of the alternative that maximizes the present net value (PNV) and how the selected alternative compares to this alternative. According to the economic analysis displayed in the Final EIS, Alternative B, because of the greater number of acres suitable for commercial timber harvesting, maximizes PNV. The Selected Alternative, Alternative E Modified has the third highest PNV of the five alternatives considered. Appendix B of the Final EIS

includes a detailed description of the economic analysis.

## **Endangered Species Act**

The Endangered Species Act creates an affirmative obligation "...that all Federal Departments and agencies shall seek to conserve endangered and threatened (and proposed) species" of fish, wildlife, and plants. This obligation is further clarified in the national Interagency Memorandum of Agreement (dated August 30, 2000) which states our shared mission to "...enhance conservation of imperiled species while delivering appropriate goods and services provided by the lands and resources."

The Selected Alternative does the best job of protecting threatened, endangered and sensitive species. The 2006 Forest Plan was developed with our responsibilities concerning conservation of listed species (section 7(a)(1) foremost in mind. Based upon consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, their concurrence with our Biological Assessment, and the non-jeopardy finding in their Biological Opinion, I have determined that the 2006 Forest Plan is in compliance with the Endangered Species Act.

## **Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) and Forest Service Strategic Plan, 2004-2008**

The 1982 Planning regulations (36 CFR 219.12 (f) (6)) require that at least one alternative be developed that responds to and incorporates the Resources Planning Act Program's tentative resource objectives for each National Forest as displayed in Regional Guides. The Forest Service Strategic Plan 2004 – 2008, in lieu of a Resource Planning Act Program, was completed in accordance with the Government Performance Results Act (GPRA) and the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. While forest plans should be consistent with the broad guidance provided in the Strategic Plan, and should consider the information provided by the Resource Planning

Act Assessment along with other available and relevant science, neither the Strategic Plan nor the Assessment contain recommended outputs to incorporate in specific forest plans. I find the 2006 Forest Plan to be in compliance with the Forest Service Strategic Plan, and to contribute towards its goals, which are:

### **Reduce the risk from catastrophic wildland fire**

Restoring fire regimes, using both prescribed fire and wildland fire use, will be used as a tool to enhance ecosystem resiliency and to maintain desired fuel levels. Fire will play its natural role where appropriate and desirable, but will be actively suppressed where necessary to protect life, investments, and resources. Effects of wildland fire will be acceptable, and fire will operate within historical fire regimes appropriate to the vegetation type. Firefighter and public safety will be the first priority in every fire management activity.

### **Reduce the impacts from invasive species**

The Forest will remain as free of non-native invasive species (NNIS) as reasonably possible. While some invasive species may occasionally be found on the Forest, occurrences will not be so widespread as to cause negative impacts to native communities. The 2006 Forest Plan has an objective to minimize adverse effects of NNIS on National Forest resources and incorporates NNIS control into goals and objectives for ecosystem management, education, and relationships with partners and community organizations.

### **Provide outdoor recreation opportunities**

The 2006 Forest Plan provides for a diverse range of high-quality and sustainable recreational opportunities that complement those off National Forest System lands. The 2006 Forest Plan contains specific standards and guidelines to provide for recreation use while sustaining ecological processes and functions.

**Help meet energy resource needs**

The 2006 Forest Plan provides direction that allows for energy development within the capabilities and sensitivities of specific landscapes across the Forest. As demand for renewable energy grows, it is likely that over the short-term there will be increased pressure on National Forest System lands to provide wind power sites. The Forest will protect, improve, or mitigate energy development impacts on watersheds, riparian and aquatic habitats, visual integrity, and threatened, endangered, and sensitive species habitats.

**Improve watershed condition**

Forest watersheds, streams, water dependent resources, and designated uses will be protected and restored by implementing practices designed to maintain or improve conditions. Streams will be managed at proper functioning condition to dissipate stream energy associated with high water flows, thereby decreasing erosion, reducing flood damage, and improving water quality. Watersheds will continue to provide high quality water for public water supplies, recreational activities, aquatic biota such as fish, and other purposes.

**Mission related work that supports Forest Service Goals**

The 2006 Forest Plan was developed consistent with the overall laws and policies that guide the management of National Forests. It provides for human uses of the environment as well as sustaining ecological processes for future generations. It also includes standards and guidelines to protect, improve, or mitigate impacts to watersheds, riparian and aquatic habitats, visual integrity, and threatened, endangered, and sensitive species habitats. Monitoring and evaluation are incorporated to ensure an adaptive management approach that is consistent with land capability, scientific understanding, and expected outputs.

**Healthy Forest Restoration Act**

In 2003, the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) was signed into law. While the GMNF

is not dominated by fire-dependent ecosystems, I find the 2006 Forest Plan is consistent with the HFRA in that it provides for the protection of old growth when conducting projects covered by the HFRA, provides for public involvement in assessing and conducting hazardous fuels reduction projects, and prioritizes areas for hazardous fuels reduction based on condition class and fire regime. The 2006 Forest Plan allows for appropriate responses to insect and disease concerns based on its overall land allocation process. The 2006 Forest Plan also emphasizes protection and enhancement of riparian areas and watershed health as directed under the HFRA.

**Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898)**

Executive Order 12898 (59 Federal Register 7629, 1994) directs federal agencies to identify and address, as appropriate, any disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations and low-income populations. I have determined, from the analysis disclosed in the Final EIS, that the 2006 Forest Plan is in compliance with Executive Order 12898.

My conclusion, based upon the analysis in the Final EIS, is that the risk of disproportionate effects on minority or low-income populations resulting from the programmatic 2006 Forest Plan is very low.

**National Historic Preservation Act**

The 2006 Forest Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific, ground-disturbing activity. Projects undertaken in response to direction of the 2006 Forest Plan will fully comply with the laws and regulations that ensure protection of cultural resources. The 2006 Forest Plan contains direction for cultural resource management, including direction to integrate cultural resource management with other resource management activities.

Several other laws apply to the preservation of cultural resources on federal land. Since the



2006 Forest Plan does not authorize ground-disturbing activities, consultation with the Vermont State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) under the NHPA was not required. Tribal consultation has taken place during the development of this 2006 Forest Plan.

It is my determination that the 2006 Forest Plan complies with the National Historic Preservation Act and other statutes that pertain to the protection of cultural resources.

### **Government-to-Government Relations with Native American Tribal Government, 1994**

These policies support the Forest Service actions in establishing mutual and beneficial partnerships with American Indians and Alaska Natives and honoring treaty obligations. The 2006 Forest Plan is consistent with Forest Service policy in Forest Service Manual section 1563.

### **Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Executive Order 13186**

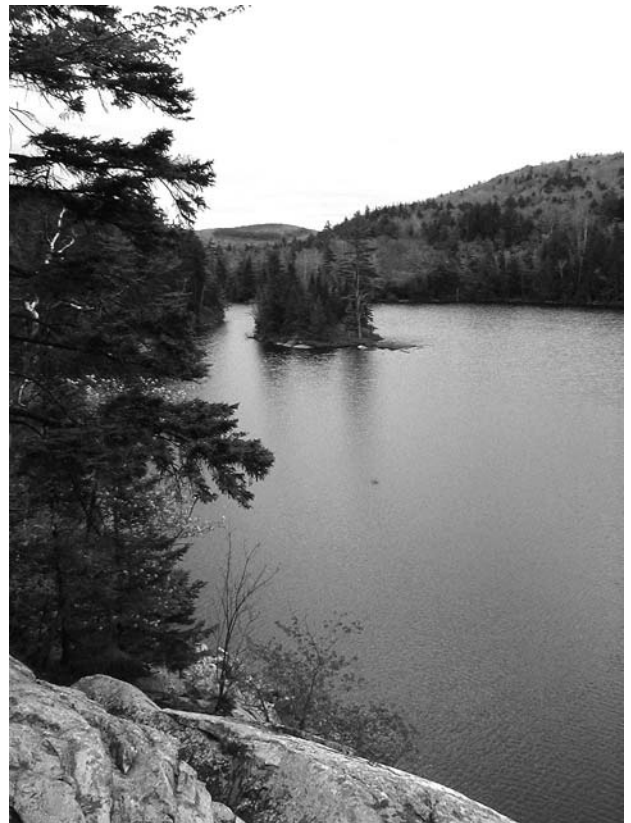
The 2006 Forest Plan is a programmatic framework guiding future decision-making and is permissive in nature. As such, it does not authorize, fund, or implement any site-specific activity. The 2006 Forest Plan focuses on enhancing ecological health and plant and animal community diversity to the benefit of wildlife species, including migratory birds. The management direction in the 2006 Forest Plan is in compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and was developed with full consideration of the broad objectives and intent of Executive Order 13186.

### **Data Quality Act**

The USDA Data Quality Act and its federal guidelines concern the quality of information used in the work of federal agencies. The 2006 Forest Plan and its accompanying Final EIS were developed by an interdisciplinary team of agency scientists and resource specialists using the best available scientific information. Data quality was a paramount concern, as the

objectivity and quality of scientific data is vital to development of a realistic resource plan. The interdisciplinary team was aware of USDA information guidelines and devoted considerable effort towards ensuring that the information used in Plan development was credible and appropriate for the context. Scientific information was solicited from other federal agencies, state resource agencies, and other recognized experts and scientists. Although the USDA Data Quality Act guidelines are not intended to be legally binding regulations, they were carefully considered during development of the 2006 Forest Plan and Final EIS.

Little Rock Pond



## **USDA Forest Service Travel Management Rule**

The Travel Management Rule (70 Federal Register 68264), dated November 9, 2005 (36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295) revised regulations regarding travel management on National Forest System lands to clarify policy related to motor vehicle use including off-highway vehicles. This rule prohibits the use of motor vehicles off the designated system or use inconsistent with those designations once designations are published. Any new trail designation will occur subsequent to this decision. Further site-specific analysis will be required, as appropriate, when changing the transportation system in designating those roads, trails and areas open to motorized uses.

## **Other Laws, Policy and Regulations**

I also find that the 2006 Forest Plan and Final EIS are consistent with the following body of policy and regulation: the National Energy Policy Act (Executive Order 13212 of May 18, 2001), The National Energy Policy Act of 2005, the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Energy Requirement and Conservation Potential, Executive Order 13112 on Invasive Species, Secretary of Agriculture's Memorandum #1827 on Prime Farmland, Rangeland and Forestland, Executive Order 1099 on the Protection of Wetlands and Floodplains, and the existing body of national direction for managing National Forests.

## Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation

### Implementation Begins in 30 Days

The 2006 Forest Plan becomes effective 30 calendar days after the Notice of Availability of the Record of Decision and Final EIS is published in the Federal Register (36 CFR 219.10 (c)(1), 1982 planning rule).

### Transition from the 1987 Forest Plan to the 2006 Forest Plan

2006 Forest Plan direction will apply to all projects that have decisions made on or after the effective date of this Record of Decision. Because this was a revision of the 1987 GMNF Plan, many aspects and much management direction from the 1987 Forest Plan are carried forward relatively unchanged into the 2006 Forest Plan. Therefore, many existing projects and ongoing actions that were consistent with the 1987 Forest Plan will continue to be so with the 2006 Forest Plan.

Many management actions decided prior to the issuance of the Record of Decision are routine and ongoing. Those decisions will generally be allowed to continue unchanged because the projected effects of these actions are part of the baseline analysis considered in the Final EIS and Biological Assessments for the revision.

The National Forest Management Act requires that “permits, contracts and other instruments for use and occupancy” of National Forest System lands be “consistent” with the Forest Plan (16 U.S.C. 1640(i)). In the context of a 2006 Forest Plan, the National Forest Management Act specifically conditions this requirement in three ways:

- These documents must be revised only “when necessary”
- These documents must be revised as “soon as practicable”
- Any revisions are “subject to valid existing rights”

As the decision maker, I have the discretion, on a case-by-case basis, to modify preexisting authorizations to bring them into compliance with the 2006 Forest Plan standards and guidelines. I find that the statutory criteria of “as soon as practicable” and excepting “valid existing rights” useful in exercising that discretion.

I have decided not to modify any existing timber sale contracts solely due to the 2006 Forest Plan. These contracts will be executed according to their terms, and these effects and conditions were considered in the Final EIS. Existing timber contracts, in most cases, will be completed within three years. The decision is left to the Forest Supervisor to determine whether to modify decisions authorizing timber sales not currently under contract.

Other use and occupancy agreements are substantially longer than timber contracts, and will be reviewed to determine whether or when the Forest Supervisor should exercise discretion to bring them into compliance with the 2006 Forest Plan. Recent project decisions that have not yet been implemented will be reviewed and adjusted by the decision maker, if necessary, to meet the direction found in the 2006 Forest Plan.

### Key Considerations in Plan Implementation

The 2006 Forest Plan provides broad, strategic, landscape-level direction for managing the GMNF. Working toward the desired conditions and achieving the objectives in the 2006 Forest Plan will be accomplished through site-specific project decisions, using the appropriate analyses and processes to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and other laws and regulations. The 2006 Forest Plan itself makes no project-level decisions.

The Final EIS for the 2006 Forest Plan considered and evaluated the total management program that likely would be necessary to implement the objectives of the 2006 Forest Plan. It also dealt with those issues and concerns relevant at a larger

landscape or Forest-wide level. Therefore, in essence, the Final EIS is a large cumulative effects document because it analyzed the broad effects of the management direction that may be expected in the next decade (and longer term), and discloses the Forest-wide effects of those activities considered in total.

By tiering to the 2006 Forest Plan Final EIS, we will make use of this Forest-wide analysis to streamline our environmental analyses for project-level decisions. We will not revisit landscape or Forest-wide scale issues and effects, because those effects have already been considered and disclosed in the Final EIS. This has applicability to a wide range of findings that are appropriately done at the Forest-wide level. Analysis and findings related to species viability and threatened species should be greatly simplified when projects are within the parameters of the 2006 Forest Plan and Final EIS. Project level analysis will not revisit Plan decisions, but rather will determine which management techniques (if any) and mitigations (beyond those in the 2006 Forest Plan) are best suited to each individual project.

## **Future Changes to the Plan**

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Monitoring is designed to answer questions regarding implementation of the 2006 Forest Plan. Monitoring and evaluation will focus on decisions made in this Record of Decision.

Evaluation reports will display how Forest Plan decisions have been implemented, how effective the implementation has proved to be in accomplishing desired outcomes, and what we learned along the way. This will allow a check and review of the validity of the assumptions upon which this decision is based.

The Monitoring Framework in Chapter 4 of the 2006 Forest Plan ties well with the strategic nature of forest plans, with increasing specificity as the Plan is stepped down to specific projects. More specific monitoring methods, protocols, and analytical procedures will be included in a monitoring and evaluation implementation guide, as needed.

### **Amending the Forest Plan**

The revision of the Forest Plan is shaped by a central idea: how we manage the Forest should adapt to changes in how we understand the ecological, social, and economic environments. In the Forest Service, we call this adaptive management. The 2006 Forest Plan is well structured for adaptive management to occur, because it does a good job of describing the desired conditions toward which we will strive as we implement the Plan. In fact, those desired conditions are the very basis for the projects we will accomplish during the life of the Plan.

In making the decision on the 2006 Forest Plan, I am also deciding that this Plan will be adaptive and subject to change as we monitor, learn, and gain new information. I hope that you choose to be partners with us in our monitoring, learning, and adapting. The revision of the Green Mountain National Forest Plan has taken many years, and has incorporated much that has been learned since the 1987 Forest Plan and even as the 2006 Forest Plan was being developed. This Plan can still be improved as we learn more about complex ecosystem functions and processes. It is not “cast in stone” to be unquestioningly adhered to for the next 10-15 years. We will track progress toward reaching the desired conditions identified in the Plan, and modify or redesign management actions in response to that progress. If a particular management strategy, technique, or practice is applied, its results will be monitored to determine if the desired effect is occurring. If not, a new or modified strategy will be developed, and implemented. That new strategy will also be subject to monitoring, evaluation, and, if needed, modified.

Changes to the Plan will generally take the form of plan amendments or corrections, and will follow the appropriate procedures as specified in National Forest Management Act and its regulations.

## Administrative Appeal of My Decision

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to the provisions of 36 CFR 217.3. A written notice of appeal must be filed with the Chief of the Forest Service within 90 days of the date that legal notice of this decision appears in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. Appeals must be sent to:

**Regular Mail**

USDA Forest Service Ecosystem Management Coordination  
1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Mailstop Code 1104  
Washington DC, 20250-1104

**Express Mail**

USDA Forest Service  
Ecosystem Management Coordination  
201 14th Street, SW, 3rd Floor, Central Wing  
Washington DC 20024  
Phone: (202) 205-0895

**Express Mail**

Appeals may also be filed via e-mail to: [appeals-chief@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-chief@fs.fed.us). The use of Microsoft Word (.doc), WordPerfect (.wpd) or Adobe (.pdf) is recommended.

A copy of the appeal must simultaneously be sent to the deciding officer:

Regional Forester of the Eastern Region  
USDA Forest Service  
Eastern Region  
626 East Wisconsin Avenue  
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Simultaneous electronic filing to the deciding officer should be sent to: [appeals-eastern-regional-office@fs.fed.us](mailto:appeals-eastern-regional-office@fs.fed.us)

Any notice of appeal must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9 and include at a minimum:

- A statement that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR Part 217
- The name, address, and telephone number of the appellant
- Identification of the decision to which the objection is being made
- Identification of the document in which the decision is contained, by title and subject
- Date of the decision, and name and title of the deciding officer
- Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which objection is made
- The reason for the appeal, including issues of fact, law, regulation, or policy
- Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks

## Contacts

More information on this decision, the 2006 *Green Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan*, and the *Final Environmental Impact Statement* can be obtained by contacting:

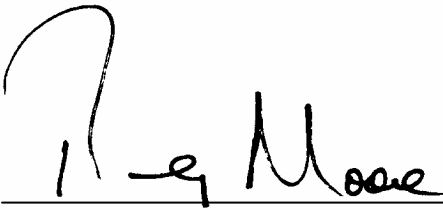
Gina Owens                      or  
Acting Forest Supervisor  
(802) 747-6704

Melissa Reichert              or  
Forest Planner  
(802) 747-6754

Holly Knox  
Assistant Forest Planner  
(802) 747-6760

231 N. Main Street  
Rutland, VT 05701

Electronic copies of the Final EIS, the Executive Summary, the 2006 Forest Plan, and the Record of Decision can be obtained at:  
[www.fs.fed.us/r9/gmfl](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/gmfl)



**RANDY MOORE**  
Regional Forester

February 10, 2006

**Date**

